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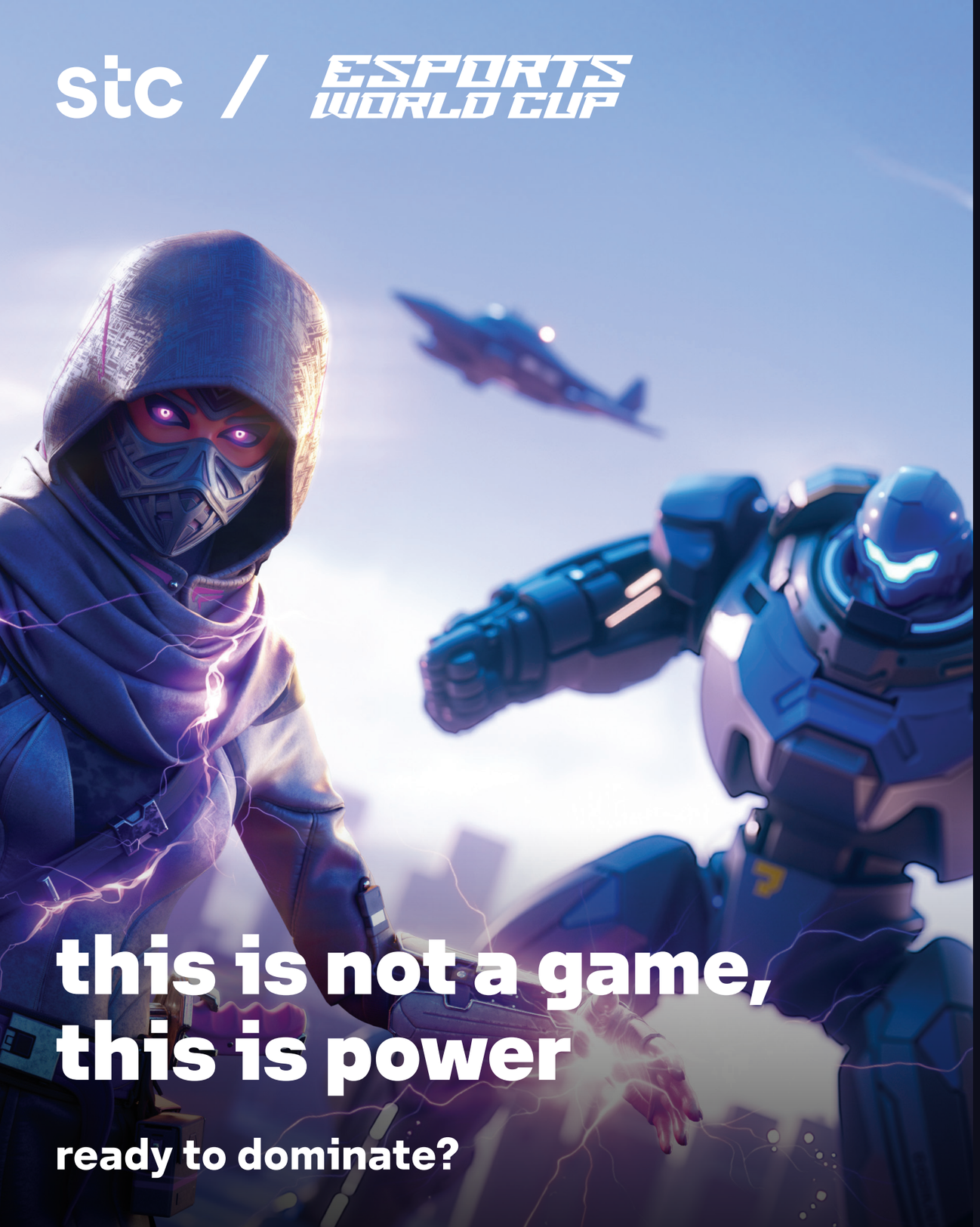

After the Bell: stc's Digital KO at Esports World Cup 2025

Lights down. The crowd held its breath. This was a glimpse of the virtual ring of the Esports World Cup (EWC) 2025 in Riyadh, a spellbinding showdown where marquee fighting game franchises like Fatal Fury: City of the Wolves, Street Fighter 6, and Tekken 8 took center stage.

But while fans reveled in the action-packed performances, a rock-solid digital powerhouse kept the show running behind the scenes. With every block, jab and punch landed, heavyweight contender stc group was delivering digital knockouts with exceptional precision.

Making a comeback as the Elite and Founding Partner of EWC 2025, stc built the digital backbone that powered every pulse, combo and collision across the tournament. With 27 ultra–high–capacity 5G towers, over 1,295 indoor antennas and speeds beyond 2 Gbps, stc group sculpted the digital foundation that supported every high-octane match.

Fatal Fury: Where Every Frame is a Title Bout

Here is a nod to the golden era of arcade fighting. As 16 of the world's finest players enter the ring, all vying for a share of the $1 million prize pool, the stakes have never been higher.

The highly-anticipated 'Fatal Fury: City of the Wolves' revived a classic with its signature combat mechanics – Just Defense, Hyper Defense, and the Strategic Selective Potential Gear (S.P.G.) system, all built around a flashy REV System, a unique gameplay feature that allows players to use dynamic offensive moves and defensive maneuvers.

By extension, stc's high-bandwidth network and ultra-low latency delivered a seamless experience, ensuring every REV-powered combo, feint, and guard cancel move was registered with frame-perfect accuracy. stc tracked thousands of player actions, routing data through more than 20 optimized gaming and streaming servers and over 3,600 gateway actions to keep latency ultra low across the tournament footprint.

Street Fighter 6: Speed Meets Agility

In Street Fighter 6 (SF6), fluid movement and frame-perfect reversals are more crucial than ever. The game's dynamic Drive Gauge system — a power meter that fills over time — empowers players to execute advanced techniques like Drive Parry, Drive Impact, Drive Rush, and Overdrive. These moves demand swift reflexes and precise timing, allowing players to turn the tide of the battle in an instant.

The game also offers Modern Controls, a single-button system that simplifies complex inputs, enabling players to perform flashy moves with ease.

With data circuit speeds exceeding 5 Gbps, stc supported SF6's fast-paced gameplay by maintaining sub-millisecond input registration, which guaranteed that every move — whether executed through classic six-button inputs or modern controls — was registered in real time, even during peak demand.

Tekken 8: A Masterclass in Real-time Analytics

Tekken 8 accelerates the action with its new Heat System — a gameplay mechanic that activates once per round for about 10 seconds, boosting offense with special combat moves. Every activation demands precise timing, fast-paced combos, and real-time decisions.

stc's live analytics infrastructure powered the game's data-intensive demands, feeding high-resolution visuals and real-time dashboards (hit counts, stun durations, block ratios) to fans worldwide, while preserving Tekken 8's rapid-fire responsiveness through every juggle and Heat-fueled flurry.

Meet the Brain Behind the Punch: stc's Corner–Man Ops Center

Inside the region's largest operations hubs, stc orchestrated flawless gameplay 24/7. Fueled by 11 live dashboards that probed KPIs every 30 seconds and monitored via ultra — high — resolution 168 MP displays, the center was fully staffed by stc's dedicated engineers and technicians, reacting instantly to any jitter, any frame drop.

The Final Showdown

As the final bell rang and champions were crowned, one truth remained clear: while the fighters may take the spotlight, stc's digital infrastructure ensured the show kept going.

stc's commitment to excellence, innovation, and seamless connectivity made EWC 2025 not just a tournament, but a testament to what happens when technology and talent collide.

OPENING SHOTS

Closing in on a featherweight world title shot, the super-skilled Bruce “Shu Shu” Carrington returned to The Theatre at Madison Square Garden to face unbeaten Namibian Mateus Heita. In his second outing of 2025, Carrington produced a near-flawless display to win a wide unanimous decision in his first 12-round bout.

Mikey Williams/Top Rank

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COME OUT WRITING

On July 19, Manny Pacquiao returned to the ring at age 46 for a shot at Mario Barrios' WBC welterweight title, with the fight ending in a draw. We asked readers to give their thoughts on the performance and share some memories from the Filipino legend's epic (and still unfolding) career.

During the height of his career, Manny was one of those fighters who, despite the early (or late, depending on how you look at it) timing for U.K. fight fans, you would make an event out of staying up until 5 a.m. to watch. Unless he was fighting his main rival of the time – and my favorite boxer of that era – Juan Manuel Marquez, I'd be up, awake and full of beans to cheer the PacMan on!

So when Pacquiao announced a comeback fight, I was apprehensive but also excited to relive those early-morning viewings of an all-time great, and while it was harder to do than back in the day, I was up and awake and in awe of what Manny was doing. He put up a great performance that not only he himself could be proud of, but one that all of his fans across the globe could be inspired by, especially for those of us who are a little bit older now and looking for a return to our own glory days. Way to go, Manny, doing it for the old guys! Thanks for another great memory, champ.

Tony Little

Pacquiao at age 46 looked good but not great, as his agility and speed have deteriorated compared to the historic fights he delivered – vs. Oscar De La Hoya, Antonio Margarito, Miguel Cotto, Erik Morales and Juan Manuel Marquez. He had ring rust from not fighting since 2021. Manny can achieve another title at his age. A rematch against Barrios or [a challenge to] Rolly Romero can be an option. Fans want more of Pacquiao, the one and only, the greatest of all time.

Liber Yasser

During his fight with Yordenis Ugás in 2021, I realized Pacquiao was no longer the same fighter who once dominated the ring. Even before the final decision, I already felt that Pac was losing the match. However, versus Barrios, I saw glimpses of the old Manny Pacquiao, especially with the color of his trunks, the same ones he wore during his first U.S. fight. As the challenger, he was the more aggressive fighter. Although Barrios landed some solid jabs and counters, I believe Pacquiao should have won the fight. That level of aggression from rounds 1 to 12 isn't something you often see, especially from a 46-year-old fighter. I wasn't expecting that kind of performance from Manny. The question now is: Who will he fight next? If I were to choose, the fight that should really happen is Pacquiao vs. Mayweather 2. It would be the ultimate bout for Pacquiao to truly chase history – and maybe finally settle the debate on who the real GOAT of boxing is in this generation.

Erick Baldo

This is Ron, 28, from the Philippines. Ever since I was a child, I watched Pacquiao fight during his glory days until past his prime. I even rewatched Pacquiao's notable wins recently. Those wins against big names in boxing, those controversial losses during the later part of his career – but win or lose, we always believed in him. Before Pacquiao had a fight, that day was like a holiday in our country; all of the people watched him fight on television, no traffic and no crime.

Like then and until now, we – and I personally – wanted Pacquiao to win the fight against Barrios. But as I watched the fight, Pacquiao was [not] the same. Not much power, no more speed, not much footwork, no more jab-combinations like when he fought in his glory days. Father Time really got him.

Sad to say, I think Pacquiao should retire for good. Maybe he can still fight and can win against unrated boxers, but I think he has a small chance and I doubt that he can compete for a world title against the champions at welterweight.

For me, Pacquiao has nothing to prove. The only eight-division world champion in boxing history. I believe no one will beat that record for a long time. Maybe in the future someone will, but maybe never.

Ron Mark Grande

I grew up in the Philippines during the '90s, wherein you only had basketball, boxing and billiards to watch on network TV. I remember seeing Manny Pacquiao during my high school days, and my brother and I cracked up watching him. He was like Wolverine from an arcade game we used to play. Pacquiao was all over his opponent. He punched fast, wild and he didn't care. It was his brawling style that left an indelible mark on my mind. Fast-forward to 2003, I got reacquainted again with Pacquiao when he broke Marco Antonio Barrera in 11 rounds. He was still the same boxer as in my teenage years. After that, I hardly missed any Pacquiao fight, up to his retirement in 2021.

It felt surreal to see Pacquiao again in 2025. As the match progressed, I realized that there were still some flashes that brought back memories of the Pacquiao of my high school days, but one cannot deny that like everybody else, time has caught up with him. Pacquiao's last hurrah is on borrowed time. The wild old days of PacMan are coming to an end, but his memories will live on for guys who grew old together with him.

Rensi Rosales

As a 53-year-old male, seeing Manny return to the ring after a four-year hiatus, I felt inspired. I thought his timing was a little off, but I commend his effort. As a volume puncher, the legend was not able to maintain his usual momentum, and reaction time seemed to be slightly diminished. With that being said, his mindset is probably what can see him through if he were to continue with another bout.

Jeff McIntosh

The early rounds saw a more vintage version of Pacquiao and, in my eyes at least, a massive improvement from the sluggish version who lost a decision to Yordenis Ugas in 2021. Don't get me wrong, Pacquiao looked great for 46 and I think he proved a lot of people wrong, but not without some areas to critique. I mean, boxing's only eight-division world champion showed us all he still has something left, but there's no denying Father Time appeared to have his way with Pacquiao, as he slowed down by the mid to late rounds. But again, isn't that expected of an inactive 46-year-old former champ?

From an entertainment and nostalgia perspective, I would love to see Manny Pacquiao back in the ring. I am sure the majority of fight fans would like to see him return as well. Manny transcends boxing. He's a cultural icon, a man who has an entire country behind him and a fighter with much left in the tank after watching that performance. However from an actual fighting standpoint, as good as his performance was, I'm still wary of what's next.

Sebastian Milo

I consider Barrios the lightest touch of all the champions at welterweight. The easiest option for any contender. I believe Manny edged the fight, which is an indictment of Barrios. He will go home knowing he doesn't deserve to be the champion. The WBC chose to entertain this farce in sanctioning a 46-year-old Manny Pacquiao after a four-year layoff. It's a circus.

Olubusayo Igbekele

It was nostalgic to see Manny Pacquiao returning after four years out and at the age of 46. All the memories of watching PacMan destroy opponents came flooding back. The performance I thought was really incredible, considering the circumstances. He fought hard for 12 rounds and never gassed out. I was concerned about seeing him get hurt, and he did take some shots, but I don't think he was ever in trouble. I think the draw was a fair result. There were a lot of close rounds, and Mario Barrios didn't really push to win the fight, mainly keeping Pacquiao at bay with the jab.

Sometimes it was sad to see, knowing that in his prime Manny would take an opponent of this caliber apart quickly. But I think he put up a good fight at world-title level, to many people's surprise, so who are we to tell him whether he should or shouldn't be fighting? I think if he is to carry on fighting, Rolly Romero could be a good fight next.

Matt Bradbury

I was thrilled to see Manny Pacquiao return to the ring at age 46, and I have to say, he looked incredible. Even though I was a bit worried going into the fight, he really proved that age is just a number. He moved and fought like someone much younger, and his performance was truly impressive. On my scorecard, he definitely won the fight. As much as I love seeing him in the ring, I do think it might be the perfect time for him to enjoy a well-deserved retirement.

David Young

Watching Manny Pacquiao step back into the ring at 46 felt like witnessing time fold in on itself. It wasn't just nostalgia – it was a reminder that legends age, but greatness doesn't.

He didn't move like a man chasing lost youth. He moved like a man reminding us who he is — a storm in human form.

The speed? Still there.

The angles? Unpredictable as he's always been.

The footwork? Like jazz – smooth, rhythmic.

Sure, the reflexes and punching power may have dipped a notch, but the intent behind every punch carried the weight of a thousand wars fought in silence.

This wasn't a comeback. It was a statement.

That boxing isn't done with Manny Pacquiao.

Because Manny Pacquiao isn't done with boxing.

Hesham Alnasser

I wasn't expecting too much from Manny at 46 and after his exhibition fights, where his balance and timing were off, but he really surprised me. His balance was good and there were bursts of some classic Manny combos. His defense struggled a bit with the jab, but I believe he did enough to win the fight by one or two rounds. All in all, a great performance for someone 46 who hadn't boxed properly for four years. There will never be another Manny Pacquiao.

Chris Dane

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Harry How

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Al Bello

RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

MIDYEAR **AWARD CANDIDATES**

Time flies putting out a monthly publication, so it wasn't until your favorite boxing magazine staff wrapped production on this issue during the first days of August that I realized that we're already past the halfway mark of this year.

Seven months went by in a blur due to the magazine grind and a busy travel schedule, but I've been taking notes on the best fights, rounds, knockouts and upsets, as well as the standout performers so far.

That's right, it's already time to start thinking about candidates for The Ring's 2025 awards. Apart from Fighter of the Year, there are frontrunners for most of the categories.

Fighter of the Year is still wide open, which isn't surprising, given how inactive elite boxers are these days. But part of the anticipation for the second half of 2025 is seeing who wins the major showdowns to earn The Ring's most prestigious honor.

Here are my candidates for the annual awards:

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Terence Crawford (if he beats Canelo) – If Bud can pull this off (and many think he can), it will be the boldest move since Manny Pacquiao jumped from his pitstop at lightweight to take on Oscar De La Hoya at welterweight in December 2008. The peak PacMan – who outpointed Juan Manuel Marquez for the Ring/WBC 130-pound championship, brutalized David Diaz to lift the WBC 135-pound strap and then retired the faded Golden Boy in 2008 – was an easy choice for Fighter of the Year. Crawford can achieve the same recognition with one fight if he beats Alvarez for the undisputed super middleweight championship.

Dmitry Bivol (if he beats Artur Beterbiev again) – Bivol brilliantly outpointed his formidable countryman to win the undisputed light heavyweight championship in their hotly contested February rematch. If he can emphatically win the rubber match, he could be in the running to become the first two-time Fighter of the Year from Russia.

Jesse Rodriguez (if he beats Fernando Martinez) – There has only

been one sub-bantamweight Fighter of the Year in The Ring's 97-year history of the award (Michael Carbajal in 1993), so Bam is a long shot. However, the 115-pound champ reminded us of his generational talent by expertly breaking down Phumelela Cafu to a 10-round TKO, adding the WBO strap to his Ring and WBC titles in July. If Rodriguez does the same to the fearsome "Puma" in November, further unifying the division, maybe he'll get the votes.

Oleksandr Usyk (if he fights and beats Joseph Parker) – As tough and experienced as Parker is, few will give him a shot to upset the undisputed heavyweight champ if that WBO mandatory is made this year. No disrespect to the New Zealander, it's just that Usyk is already considered an all-time great. The fifth-round KO of Daniel Dubois in their July rematch put a cherry on top of that earned status. If the Ukrainian legend were to win this year's honor, he'd join an elite group of three-time winners that includes Rocky Marciano, Evander Holyfield and Manny Pacquiao. He'd also be the first back-to-back winner since Pacquiao did it in 2008 and 2009.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

Kenshiro Teraji TKO 12 Seigo Yuri Akui – This flyweight title unification battle of attrition is my front-runner, so far. The March showdown featured fierce back-and-forth exchanges from Round 1 to the dramatic final-round finish.

Callum Smith UD 12 Joshua Buatsi – This was an old-fashioned dustup between light heavyweight contenders. Every time one fighter seemed to gain the upper hand, the other battled his way back into contention. Smith, the 35-year-old veteran who was in a must-win situation, dug a little deeper.

Chris Eubank Jr. UD 12 Conor Benn – It's not often that a heavily hyped matchup exceeds the promises of the promoters and the expectations of the public, but that's what the sons of Britain's most famous modern rivalry delivered to 67,000 fans at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and a solid PPV audience. Fans got their money's worth with this one.

Naoya Inoue TKO 8 Ramon Cardenas – When the sport needed it most, The Monster and a 15-to-1 underdog produced a shootout that set the boxing world on fire.

KO OF THE YEAR

Brian Norman Jr. KO 5 Jin Sasaki – My front-runner, so far. Sasaki was a prime candidate to get KTFO by an accurate puncher like the WBO welterweight titleholder, and Norman's left-hook chiller that put the brazen challenger on his back in Round 5 was as cold – and scary – as KOs get.

Zhanibek Alimkhanuly TKO 5 Anauel Ngamissengue – This was not a cold KO, but the unified middleweight titleholder's perfectly timed pair of left crosses – the first setting up the second – were as beautiful to witness as they were brutal on the valiant challenger, whose dramatic collapse into the ropes and onto the canvas necessitated a stoppage even though he beat the count.

Fabio Wardley KO 10 Justis Huni – Outclassed for nine and a half rounds by a fellow unbeaten heavyweight hopeful, the British attraction needed something big late in the fight and he found it with a massive right hand.

UPSET OF THE YEAR

Ricardo Sandoval SD 12 Kenshiro Teraji – My front-runner, so far. I've followed Sandoval's career since his 17th pro bout, watched him develop from prospect to Ring-rated flyweight, but I didn't think he could dethrone the Japanese veteran. However, the Californian got up from a fourth-round knockdown and displayed the best technique of his career while matching Teraji's punch output in a terrific fight. The vacant Ring title could be on the line in a rematch.

Jorge Garcia Perez SD 12 Charles Conwell – Most pundits viewed the undefeated American Olympian as the dark horse of the very deep 154-pound division, but he got outhustled by the gritty Mexican fringe contender.

Rolando Romero UD 12 Ryan Garcia – Romero was a threat with his big right hand, but who saw him outpointing Garcia? The same guy who got blasted by Gervonta Davis and beat up by Isaac Cruz (and was lucky to get the "W" vs. Jackson Marinez and Ismael Barroso) boxed with a sense of purpose after flooring Garcia in the second round.

Armando Resendiz SD 12 Caleb Plant – The 11-to-1 underdog spoiled the PBC's plans for a Plant vs. Jermall Charlo PPV later this year by outslugging the veteran former super middleweight titleholder.

James Dickens KO 4 Albert Batyrgaziev – Nobody thought "Jazza" – who had been stopped by Guillermo Rigondeaux, Kid Galahad and Argentine fringe contender Hector Sosa – had a shot against the formidable Russian Olympic gold medalist, but the scrappy Liverpudlian confidently found it – with a series of left hands in Round 4 – breathing new life into his career at junior lightweight.

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

Daigo Higa – The former flyweight titleholder is my midyear choice for this award even though he announced his retirement after his draw with Antonio Vargas on July 30. His bantamweight

Rodriguez: Melina Pizano ; Norman: Naoki Fukuda

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journey seemed over with a razor-thin loss to WBO beltholder Yoshiki Takei last September, but the Okinawan slugger established himself as a top five 118-pounder with back-to-back unanimous draws (how rare is that?) in title bouts vs. Seiya Tsutsumi and Vargas in 2025.

Manny Pacquiao – The Hall of Famer didn't beat Father Time or Mario Barrios but didn't lose (and, more importantly, he didn't get beat up). He looked good in spots, good enough for many to think he deserved the nod, good enough for the Ring Ratings Panel to want him back in the welterweight rankings at age 46.

Gary Antuanne Russell – All but dismissed after dropping a split decision to Alberto Puello last year, the junior welterweight was as relentless as he was technical in nearly shutting out Jose Valenzuela for his first world title.

Gary Russell Jr. – How about the oldest and most talented brother of the Russell clan? Despite three and a half years off, the former featherweight titleholder showed no rust at all in his lightweight debut, a 10th-round TKO of Hugo Castaneda.

Rolando Romero – The "Rolly Show" was thought to be over after his stoppage loss to Pitbull Cruz last March. But here he is, back in line for huge paydays.

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

Emiliano Vargas (15-0, 13 KOs) – My front-runner is the junior welterweight son of popular former champ Fernando Vargas, 3-0 in 2025 so far, and flying high after a one-punch, first-round KO of Alexander Espinoza on July 26. The 21-year-old's got star potential and he's getting better with each fight.

Curmel Moton (8-0, 6 KOs) – Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s 19-year-old protege passes the eye test, but the lightweight's brain trust needs to step up his activity and the level of his opposition.

Jadier Herrera (17-0, 15 KOs) – The flashy 22-year-old lightweight has only fought once in 2025, a seventh-round TKO of Jose Macias in March, but he was the first to stop the rugged Mexican veteran. The Cuban southpaw ate his share of right hands in the early rounds, so he's still a work in progress.

Jahi Tucker (15-1-1, 6 KOs) – The 22-year-old middleweight has won two 10-rounders vs. solid opposition – British gatekeeper Troy Williamson and former prospect Lorenzo Simpson – so far this year. Simpson gave him a good fight, which should help the New Yorker mature.

Callum Walsh (14-0, 11 KOs) – The Irish junior middleweight turned heads with a first-round KO of 19-1 Scottish standout Dean Sutherland in March. At press time, the 24-year-old southpaw boxer-puncher was set to face Fernando Vargas Jr. on the Canelo-Crawford undercard, a coveted showcase that should tell us more about his potential.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

Robert Garcia – Last year's winner is my front-runner due to his fine work with Bam Rodriguez, junior middleweight standout Vergil Ortiz Jr. and lightweight titleholder Raymond Muratalla.

Ismael Salas – The Cuban guru is always a candidate for this award, but he deserves extra credit for getting Rolly Romero to box a disciplined fight.

Bozy Ennis – The Philly master has shined this year through marvelous performances by his son Jaron Ennis, featherweight titleholder Stephen Fulton and lightweight contender Andy Cruz.

Manny Robles – The California coach who guided Andy Ruiz and Rafael Espinoza to Upset of the Year awards in 2019 and 2023 may have done it again with Armando Resendiz. He also trains Ring/WBO 115-pound champ Mizuki Hiruta, 154-pound contender Serhii Bohachuk and two-division beltholder Brandon Figueroa.

ROUND OF THE YEAR

Eubank-Benn, Round 12 – The sons of the British legends let it all hang out to the delight of nearly 70,000 fans.

Teraji-Akui, Round 12 – This is a prime example of a fighter willing himself to victory.

Gervonta Davis-Lamont Roach, Round 9 – This one is about controversy. Tank takes a knee off a punch (a jab to the eye) and it isn't ruled a knockdown, then he runs to his corner to have his coach wipe his face DURING THE ROUND and isn't disqualified for calling his own time-out. Not referee Steve Willis' best moment.

Buatsi-Smith, Round 6 – Unarguably the best round of a tremendous fight as both contenders were hurt but battled through the adversity.

Wardley-Huni, Round 10 – It ain't over 'til it's over.

Pretty solid first seven months, eh? We could have some very special events and moments over the second half of 2025.

By the way, let us know via comeoutwriting@gmail.com if I missed worthy candidates in any category. We'll make note and be sure to take them under consideration when we vote on the 2025 awards at the end of the year.

★★★★

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention three boxing lifers who passed away just before we went to press – former light heavyweight and cruiserweight champ Dwight Muhammad Qawi, trainer Tommy Brooks and promoter Don Elbaum. All three will receive proper tributes in the October issue. RING

Harry How

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Former champ Mary Jo Sanders (second from right) was part of the Class of 2025 at the IBHOF.

THE STARS ALIGN

By Al Bernstein

Three events combined this summer to revive the past, celebrate the present and portend the future of women's boxing. They were:

- The induction of legendary champion Mary Jo Sanders into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.
- The return to boxing after a 12-year absence by Holly Holm, also a member of the IBHOF.
- The landmark all-female card headlined by the third fight between Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano.

The first two events are linked by the moments those two remarkable boxers shared with each other in the ring, and their history parallels the Taylor-Serrano rivalry in many ways. The synergy between all this is striking.

The induction of Sanders this year honored a 25-1-1 career record carved out between 2003-08. She started late as a pro at 29 years of age but packed a lot into her career, including world titles in four weight divisions. She added to the rich tradition of great Detroit boxers and often thrilled her fans in the Motor City with performances in her hometown.

I have been at a number of induction weekends, and often there are certain inductees who just radiate joy at the occasion. Mary Jo's induction was especially welcomed by boxing folks, and her effusive personality and gracious approach to being honored made it special for her and for everyone else in Canastota. Interestingly, she was inducted along with Anne Sophie Mathis, who, like Sanders, had a two-fight rivalry with Holm. I shared a dinner table at the Hall of Fame with Mary Jo and Anne, and we discussed the irony of their being inducted the same month that Holm was returning

to boxing.

Holm, who has made history as a champion in both boxing and mixed martial arts, surprised many when, at age 43, she decided to return to the sport. Her decision win over Yolanda Vega on June 28 was a very solid performance, especially considering her time away from boxing as she pursued her MMA career.

The dovetailing of these two occurrences within a month made me and others think back to the two-fight rivalry between Sanders and Holm. It one of the first major multi-fight rivalries in women's boxing. I had the pleasure of announcing the first fight between the two. It happened on June 13, 2008, in Albuquerque, Holm's hometown. While it was considered the biggest match that could be made in women's boxing, it is noteworthy to see the differences between it and the Taylor-Serrano rivalry. Unlike the Madison Square Garden venue for Taylor-Serrano 1, this one was in a small showroom at the Isleta Casino and the broadcast exposure was minor in comparison. Holm-Sanders was on a more mid-level pay-per-view content provider, and while mainstream sports media couldn't get enough of Taylor-Serrano coverage in advance of the event, the Holm-Sanders fight was a tougher sell. I was actually brought onto the telecast in part because they felt my presence might garner more radio and print interviews. I did my best to help them generate media for it and did many interviews, but I distinctly remember my manager at the time talking to a couple of the radio shows about me being on, and the producers indicated they were happy to have me – as long as we talked more about the Manny Pacquiao-David Diaz fight than Holm-Sanders. Such were the challenges in 2008 for women's boxing.

In the fight itself, these two multiple-time world champions were, not surprisingly, evenly matched. The slick-boxing Holm and naturally bigger and harder-punching Sanders both performed well. Holm controlled some early and middle portions of the fight with her quickness of both hand and foot, but Sanders started to figure out the mystery in the middle rounds and closed very fast. It was a very close fight that I and my broadcast partner Arnie Rosenthal suggested could be a draw or narrow decision either way. Whether it was the hometown atmosphere for Holm, incompetence or bias, the three judges had by it an absurdly wide margin for Holm. Two cards read 98-92 and the other was 97-93, all for Holm.

Holly Holm ended her long hiatus from boxing with a shutout victory.

At the time, I was struck by how gracious Sanders was after the one-sided nature of the verdict. The same could be said of her famous dad, Detroit Lions legend Charlie Sanders, who sat ringside. Certainly it was quite possible Holm won a close decision, but this margin was clearly not accurate. They would fight again four months later in Sanders' hometown, again in a close and even more exciting fight. This time, the judges lived in reality and actually ruled it a draw. I did not do the telecast of the second fight, and to illustrate how things have changed in the reporting of women's boxing, I offer this note: At one point after an exciting exchange between the two fighters, one of the commentators said, "This is not your typical girl fight." Yes, he really said that.

The 35-year-old Sanders, seven years older than Holm, retired after that second match. Holm would continue in boxing until 2013, when she switched to MMA and fashioned a successful career there. Her return to boxing now is especially satisfying, as demonstrated by two things:

First, she performed well in her return fight, and second, at the post-fight press conference, she talked about what she could improve on as she familiarized herself with being in the ring again. Talk of self-improvement from a 43-year-old multiple-time champ in two sports was impressive to me in portending her future. Can she again win a championship in women's boxing? I don't know, but in my mind she has a chance. Wouldn't it just be nice for one of the women who helped push women's boxing ahead to reap benefits from this new golden age of the sport?

Holm is a part of Most Valuable Promotions, the group that put on the remarkable Taylor-Serrano event. That struck me as I watched, and it took me back to that night in 2008 when the second wave of pioneers in women's boxing built on what the Christy Martins and Laila Alis had previously done. Since then, the sport has kept growing and is flourishing right now, with even better days ahead. These days, I guest on plenty of radio shows and podcasts where nobody minds if I talk as much as I want about women's boxing. RING

Naoki Fukuda

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AND THEN THERE WERE NONE

By Steve Kim

Top Rank Boxing on ESPN enjoyed an eight-year run.

Xander Zayas outpointed Jorge Garcia to capture the vacant WBO junior middleweight title on July 26 in New York. As far as world title bouts go, there was nothing particularly special about this affair, which took place at The Theater at Madison Square Garden and followed fights that featured featherweight contender Bruce Carrington and junior welterweight prospect Emiliano Vargas. It was a decent night of boxing.

But it has to be asked: Will it be the last time this type of boxing card is featured on a non-pay-per-view major platform in the United States?

The July 26 broadcast ended ESPN's partnership with Top Rank, which began in 2017. During this time period, mainstay broadcasters in the U.S., including HBO, Fox and Showtime, shuttered their boxing programs. So, for the first time since the mid-1940s – when the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* on NBC began – boxing will not have a regular series featured on a U.S. terrestrial network or a cable outlet. As of now, most major boxing shows are on DAZN or pay-per-view.

Now, this isn't solely an indictment on the sport or industry of boxing. Streaming outlets are now prevalent. Cord-cutting isn't a trend anymore; it's a reality, and the days of almost every household having traditional cable are long gone.

We've been in the Netflix era for many years as far as movies and episodic shows are concerned, but now the line between traditional live TV and what started as a place to rent DVDs has also begun to blur. The highly anticipated September showdown between Canelo Alvarez and Terence Crawford will be part of the regular Netflix subscription, not pay-per-view. Given the recent track record of the streaming service, the viewing audience should be significant.

But keep this in mind: While the NFL has now entered into a partnership to air a few games on Netflix, most of their games are still shown on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and ESPN.

All those networks – along with HBO and Showtime – at one time in the past included boxing as part of their sports programming, whether it was part of a weekend anthology series or prime time broadcasts that featured major championship fights. There were also basic cable series, such as *Top Rank Boxing* on ESPN and *Tuesday Night Fights* on USA, that played to a national audience while various regional cable outlets and over-the-air networks catered to their local viewers. On the West Coast, L.A.'s KCAL-TV (channel 9) and Prime Ticket aired *Fight Night at The Forum* cards for years during the 1990s.

Now they are remnants of the past.

So, how did we get to this point? While it's easy to state one particular reason, the answer is much more complicated. It's really a little bit of everything. There was a time when boxing was among the most popular sports in America, right alongside baseball and horse racing. Now, it's largely a niche sport that's only part of the general sports news cycle once or twice a year.

Mikey Williams/Top Rank

Let's make this clear: Boxing has always been flawed. But there was a time when it was much more mainstream. Heavyweight championship bouts involving Muhammad Ali were shown to tens of millions on free TV. And later on, major events that were shown at closed-circuit locations (a precursor to pay-per-view) were replayed by those three-letter behemoths.

However, as premium/subscriber cable – HBO, and later Showtime – became prominent in the 1980s, the shift began as they routinely outbid the networks for certain fights that otherwise would have been shown on ABC, CBS or NBC. It seemed beneficial to everyone involved in the boxing business – the fighters, managers and promoters, who got larger paydays while the nascent pay-cable entities enticed potential subscribers. For HBO, its boxing division was a key piece of its ascension in the 1980s as it became the home for Mike Tyson.

They say that there is a price for everything in life. And the reality is that while certain boxers were earning career-high paydays for performing on HBO or Showtime, they were also doing so in front of a much smaller audience. It was at this time that the slow erosion began.

Eventually, the premium cable networks not only bought fights but started to in essence become promoters themselves by entering into exclusive multi-fight agreements with individual boxers. Now certain stars – from Roy Jones to Floyd Mayweather Jr. – were locked into networks with lucrative guarantees. And a certain cat-and-mouse game as to who would be their opponents began with the broadcasters and the boxers' management. While the network sought – at least in theory – acceptable opposition, managers would usually try to get the softest and safest touch approved by the paymasters.

Unfortunately, what the fans wanted in these matters was largely ignored.

Oftentimes, these network contracts meant that boxers who had become established with the public with their consistent activity suddenly became twice-a-year performers, as any extra fights would not be in the yearly programming budget. So, not only were boxers now fighting on smaller platforms, they were also doing it less often.

On top of that, the fights that fans really wanted to see were becoming more difficult to make. If a boxer was ensconced in the rival network, then you had "sides of the street" that were used as a crutch to avoid certain matchups. Certain fights weren't going to come to fruition unless they were part of a joint pay-per-view between rival promoters and networks, which took years to broker. This happened periodically with Lennox Lewis-Mike Tyson (HBO/Showtime), Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao (HBO/Showtime) and Tyson Fury-Deontay Wilder II and III (Fox Sports/ESPN+). However, these occasions were rare. Throughout the past few decades, too many fights – including the much-anticipated heavyweight showdown between then-titleholders Anthony Joshua (DAZN) and Deontay Wilder (Fox/Showtime) – were left un-fought due to the various cold wars that took place in boxing.

Eventually, HBO and Showtime would not only sign individual fighters, but entire promotional stables. Don King was exclusive to Showtime during the 1990s, as was Golden Boy for a spell in the 2010s. Matchroom had an exclusive deal with DAZN, and Top Rank (which has had various unions throughout the years) landed at ESPN. While in theory having various networks involved with the sport is a good thing, the problem is that as more and more of these entities gave exclusive output deals to promoters, you had separate universes of boxing. It actually created more division within the sport.

The truth of the matter is, you can only make a certain amount of bouts with your own roster of boxers. What we were seeing was basically a series of house fights, not truly the best matchups possible, for the most part. The days of networks having knowledgeable executives such as Alex Wallau (ABC), Mort Sharnik (CBS) and Lou DiBella (HBO) acting as program quality watchdogs are long gone.

Ten years ago, Premier Boxing Champions (PBC) launched under the guidance of Al Haymon, who tried a scorched-earth approach to the U.S. boxing landscape by engaging in a series of time-buys on seemingly every network short of C-SPAN. Part of the PBC's time-buy deals with networks that already had boxing programs was that they had to part ways with those promoters. This effort to freeze out everyone else in the sport and monopolize the business failed, and now the PBC is down to a few broadcasts on Amazon Prime, most of which are pay-per-view shows.

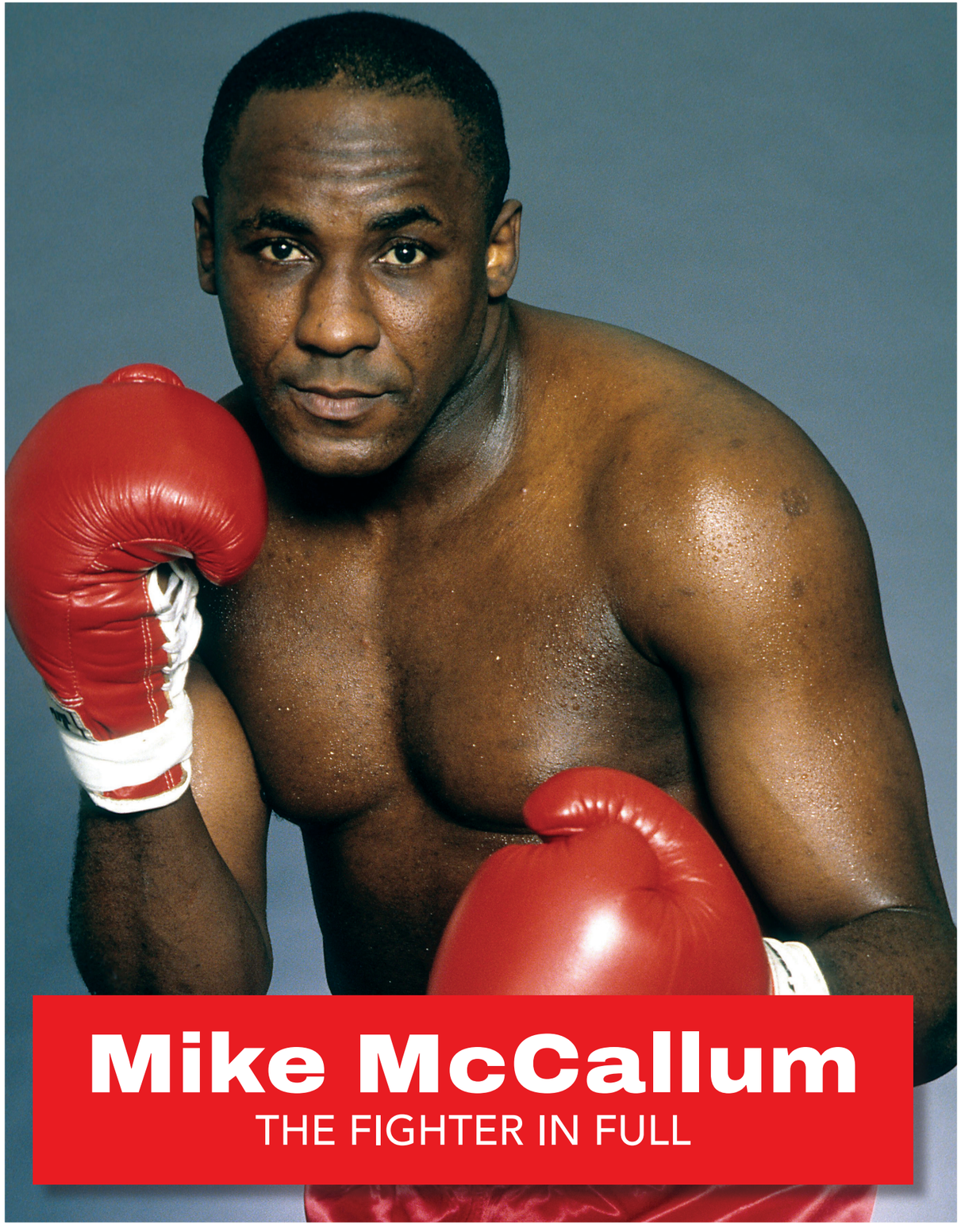
So here we are. Boxing will continue, but much like the newspaper business, it finds itself with an uncertain future and having to find a new business model that is sustainable over the long term.

Could Netflix, which has 300 million subscribers worldwide, be a lifeline to a new broadcast era? It's certainly a brand in the U.S. and the closest thing to a traditional network in terms of its audience and reach. However, so far, the king of streaming entertainment services only seems interested in big, unique events with crossover appeal – Jake Paul vs. Mike Tyson, the July 11 all-female card topped by Katie Taylor-Amanda Serrano III, and Canelo vs. Crawford – not standard boxing cards like Zayas-Garcia.

Without major broadcast entities like ESPN bringing the sport to the masses, boxing, like print news, will still exist but will continue to diminish in importance.

These two industries also share something else in common: The downfall was gradual – and then it was sudden.

Do you agree with Steve's take on the state of boxing broadcasts in America? Share your thoughts about the current boxing scene in the U.S. or your home country via comeoutwriting@gmail.com.



Mike McCallum

THE FIGHTER IN FULL

PA - PA Images

McCallum when he was the WBC light heavyweight titleholder, circa 1995.

MIKE MCCALLUM'S ABILITY TO GRIND FOES DOWN IN THE POCKET MADE HIM ONE OF THE MOST FORMIDABLE – AND AVOIDED – FIGHTERS OF HIS ERA

By Adam Abramowitz

Mike McCallum, a champion at junior middleweight, middleweight and light heavyweight, died on May 31 at the age of 68. A member of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, the Jamaican-born McCallum was relentless with both hands to his opponents' midsections, earning him the nickname "The Bodysnatcher." His left hook in particular could be a pulverizing punch.

Not the fastest or the most powerful, McCallum defeated top opponents with a combination of sterling inside-fighting technique, pressure and doggedness.

Despite winning two of his titles after the age of 30, McCallum wasn't a late bloomer. At 19, he represented Jamaica as a welterweight at the 1976 Olympics. He was also a three-time Golden Gloves champion in the United States as an amateur.

McCallum was an active professional fighter from 1981-97. He won his first world title, at junior middleweight, in 1984 against Sean Mannion. He made the last defense of his light heavyweight belt in 1995. He retired with a record of 49-5-1, featuring 36 knockouts. He was a true world champion, fighting in seven countries: The U.S., Jamaica, Italy, France, England, Monaco and Germany.

As a student of the game, McCallum was a sponge, picking up techniques from the best trainers in the business. In Jamaica as an amateur, he was coached by Austin Taffe, a forward-thinking trainer who incorporated Cuban boxing techniques for his fighters. As a professional, McCallum was surrounded by greatness in his corner, working at different times with Emanuel Steward, the George Benton/Lou Duva tandem and perhaps the greatest modern trainer of them all, Eddie Futch.

Though appreciated in his time, McCallum never attained superstardom in the way that many of his contemporaries did. Roberto Duran famously picked Tommy Hearns for a fight over McCallum, despite McCallum's No. 1 ranking for Duran's junior middleweight belt. McCallum had sparred Hearns on numerous occasions during their time together at the Kronk Gym, but Hearns never gave McCallum a shot in the pros.

Nevertheless, McCallum racked up wins against impressive fighters. His highlight reel always starts with the perfectly timed left hook he landed in the fifth round on fellow Hall of Famer Donald Curry. He also destroyed future multi-divisional champion Julian Jackson in two rounds. Other notable wins include Milton McCrory (an Emanuel Steward fighter), a rematch victory over Sumbu Kalambay (who gave McCallum his first loss as a pro), and triumphs over Steve Collins, Herol Graham, Michael Watson and Jeff Harding.

Even into his mid- and late 30s, McCallum had a memorable three-fight series with the great (and much younger) James Toney. Although McCallum was officially 0-2-1 in the three fights, Toney has often referred to McCallum as the best fighter that he has faced in the ring.

What McCallum may have lacked in hand speed or pure power, he made up for with expert ring technique at mid- and close range. McCallum was so good in the pocket that he never had to leave unless he wanted to. He had complete faith in his ability during exchanges. His chin was legendary (never stopped in 55 pro fights). He incorporated many of the lost arts of infighting in terms of defensive techniques, creative counters and how to come forward responsibly.

Two of McCallum's signature moves were specific counters after a miss. His most famous play was slipping the jab to the inside and riddling an opponent's body with a left hook. Another great move was when an opponent would overshoot a straight right. McCallum would often slip the shot to the inside and fire off a right uppercut to the body, or take a step back to evade the shot and then counter with the right uppercut to the body. McCallum was famous for making opponents pay for missing shots. His brutal effectiveness with body counters held the dual purposes of depleting his opponents and making them gun-shy to launch more offense.

McCallum also was excellent at protecting his body in close. He was able to block and parry body shots while still maintaining his offensive posture in the pocket. At close range, he often would have one of his hands down closer to his chest to take the body away. He believed enough in his reflexes and chin to deal with head shots.

McCallum was left-hand dominant. So much of his work started with his jab or left hook. In his loss to Kalambay in 1988 (which was McCallum's first attempt for a belt at middleweight), Kalambay wisely circled away from McCallum's left hand, which is unusual against an orthodox fighter but the perfect play against McCallum.

McCallum had a reputation as a slow starter, which isn't fully deserved. He scored lots of early-round KOs in his developmental fights, and whenever he was taking a stay-busy assignment during his championship days, those always seemed to end early.

But it's true that McCallum often needed several rounds to dismantle top opponents (with Jackson being a notable exception). His body work and pressure built up over time. McCallum was a breaker of wills. He would deplete fighters before stopping them; the McCrory fight is a great example of this.

There were essentially two Mike McCallum styles. His preferred style was when an opponent came to him or wanted to trade in the center of the ring (the Jackson fight, for example).

There, he was in his happy zone, where he could dig into his unlimited bag of tricks in the pocket.

But there were many fights where opponents moved away from McCallum. They didn't want to stay in the kitchen, which forced him to go hunting. In those circumstances, McCallum was a walk-down pressure fighter, and it didn't look as pretty as when he was slugging it out in the pocket. Foot speed always gave him trouble, and it could take him a few rounds to catch up with an opponent. In addition, he was often the older boxer in his biggest fights; he understood how important it was to pace himself. McCallum, who was brought up during the 15-round championship era, was built to fight all 12 rounds. He wouldn't get discouraged if he lost a couple of the early ones.

McCallum could struggle with speed. In the first Kalambay bout, he was routinely beaten to the punch and couldn't track Kalambay down on a consistent basis. The scores in that fight actually flattered McCallum (118-114, 116-115 and 115-114); you'd be hard-pressed to find more than four rounds to give him. He was able to win the rematch by being first and moving to Kalambay's left; it also didn't hurt that Kalambay had noticeably slowed down since their first fight.

As an older fighter, McCallum lost a wide decision to Roy Jones Jr. McCallum was knocked down in the fight and was never competitive in the matchup. But even if a prime McCallum were to fight Jones, Jones should have been comfortably favored to win. Jones was a style nightmare for McCallum. If a fighter had the speed, skills and endurance to fight on the outside, McCallum could potentially struggle.

In the pocket, McCallum was a force of nature, but against Toney, he was fighting a guy almost 12 years his junior who was, at a minimum, his equal at that range and had the ability to pull the trigger with more regularity.

McCallum also lost knockout power after leaving junior middleweight. Of his 36 knockouts, only 10 of those occurred at 160 pounds and above, and almost all of those were in non-title fights against lesser opposition.

McCallum's legacy as an all-time great is secure. The combination of those whom he beat and those who refused to give him a shot adds to his allure. His chances would have been good against Duran at 154 pounds in 1984, and he and Hearns were familiar enough with each other's styles to have produced an epic battle.

Unfortunately, few recent fighters have had the breadth of McCallum's skills in the pocket. Canelo features similar defensive features at mid-range while coming forward, and he also has his share of clever counters, but he doesn't possess the work rate or doggedness of McCallum on the inside. Errol Spence had the same degree of comfort with infighting that McCallum did, as well as the determination to dig to the body, but Spence wasn't in the same ballpark defensively and he didn't have the same degree of creativity on offense.

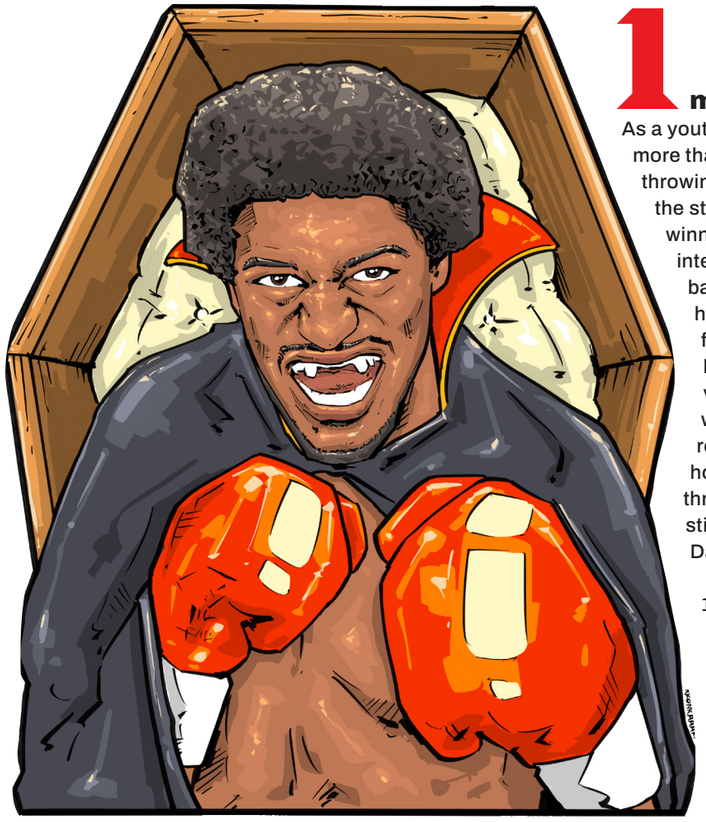
There aren't too many fighters these days who want to grind out wins in the manner that McCallum did. Although he was a successful trainer in Las Vegas after his fighting career ended, even his acolytes don't fight the way he did. His style was too taxing and relied on a granite chin. He knew that he needed to win wars of attrition – not necessarily the preferred style for today's top boxing talents.

One other thing about The Bodysnatcher: It should be remembered that two of his best stoppages resulted from head shots and not body punches. His left hook against Curry was a head shot with Curry backing up out of the pocket with his hands down. Against Julian Jackson, McCallum scored the pivotal knockdown in the fight with a short counter left hook to the head as Jackson was rushing in.

McCallum's ruthlessness could not be contained to an opponent's body. He was a well-rounded fighter – not perfect, but he could win in different ways. He'd answer the phone for any assignment, anywhere in the world. He was always ready to work. His brand of ring excellence is missed in boxing today.

Rest in peace, Champ. RING

Former undisputed champ Donald Curry was taken out with a single punch.



BY THE NUMBERS:

“VAMPIRE” JOHNSON

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

When boxing commissioners allowed it, there was nothing quite like his ring entrance. It began with Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” blasting from the house sound system. As incredulous fans watched, a coffin was rolled out. Once the coffin arrived ringside, it would open to reveal a fellow wearing a black cape. He’d leap out, opening his mouth wide to reveal long, sinister fangs. His name was Wilbert Johnson, but boxing fans knew him as “Vampire.” Here’s his story by the numbers.

1 memorable gimmick »

As a youthful amateur in Ohio, Johnson recorded more than 100 wins. A showboater known for throwing bolo punches, he was highly regarded on the state level and a multi-time Golden Gloves winner. An arrest for some criminal activity interrupted his amateur run, but he was soon back in the ring. Even back then, he called himself “Vampire.” Several of his top-front teeth had been knocked out playing high school football, giving him an oddly vampiric smile. Greg Moore, an amateur who pulled out of a fight with him, later recalled Johnson’s intimidating presence, how he taunted him at the weigh-in, threatening to drink his blood. “The Vampire still gives me the shudders,” Moore told the Dayton Daily News.

Johnson turned professional during the 1980s, when boxing fans endured a flotilla of fighters with nicknames like “Caveman,” “Bonecrusher,” “Bigfoot,” “Gator,” “The Animal,” “Wimpy” and “The Beast.” The sport was receiving more coverage than ever, and with so many slots to fill across the growing television landscape, fighters pulled out every conceivable gimmick to be noticed. Not wanting to be an ordinary middleweight, Johnson went full-blast with the vampire routine. He filled his water bottle with red food coloring so it appeared he was drinking blood between rounds. He told reporters that he kept his coffin in his bedroom. “I love the smell of blood,” Johnson said. “I drink it for breakfast every morning.”

Except when hyping himself, Johnson was soft-spoken. Since he didn’t earn much money by boxing, he worked a full-time job in maintenance at the Indianapolis Market Square Arena. Journalists joked that he worked the graveyard shift.

2 bouts with a future titleholder »

In his eighth pro fight, Johnson defeated Donny Lalonde by six-round decision. Seven months later, Lalonde avenged the loss, stopping Johnson in two. Lalonde went on to win the WBC light heavyweight title, which he later surrendered in a high-profile encounter with Sugar Ray Leonard.

7 times on ESPN »

Vampire made seven memorable appearances on ESPN’s Top Rank Boxing show.

“He was one of the more delightful characters we had over the years,” Top Rank matchmaker Bruce Trampler recently told The Ring. “Not a heavy puncher but a willing mixer, dead game, always with a smile and a hug for everyone. Just a delightful character. He and manager Pete Susens barnstormed the Midwest in those years, along with stablemates Harold Brazier, Dickie Ryan, Verdell Smith and Marty Jakubowski. All good dudes. Fun-loving, hard workers.”

Johnson’s ESPN debut was an eight-round unanimous decision over “Schoolboy” Jimmy Baker as part of a New Year’s Eve card in 1981. “Dancing” Dan Snyder was next, beaten by Johnson in March 1982, also by eight-round decision. In July of that year, Johnson scored a dramatic TKO victory over Russell Kain in Atlantic City. Knocked down in the fifth round, Johnson rose to batter Kain in the sixth, smashing one of his eyes shut. Kain didn’t come out for the seventh.

In September 1983, Johnson stepped before ESPN cameras again, this time to fight Carlos Tite in Hammond, Indiana, for something called “the Indianapolis state middleweight title.” Before 2,000 fans at the Hammond Civic Center, Tite retained his title via unanimous decision in what the Indianapolis Times called “an action-packed 10-round war.” Johnson staggered Tite in the eighth, but he couldn’t finish the job. Tite later said he’d gone numb for a second. “He can hit,” Tite said of Johnson.

By this time, Johnson’s record was 23-3-1. “I usually feel bad after a loss,” Johnson said, “but I don’t feel bad after this one. I thought I gave it to him pretty good.”

Appearing in Atlantic City for another ESPN show, Johnson had an easy time with Lenny Villers, who was badly cut in the first round and couldn’t continue. In January 1984, Johnson returned to Atlantic City for perhaps his best ESPN bout, a hard-fought 10-round draw with contender Nino Gonzalez. Johnson’s final appearance on ESPN was a loss to Mike Landini in August 1984. There’d be no return of the vampire.

“Vamp was always ready to help out,” Trampler recalled, “gladly posing for photos or lying ‘in state’ in a coffin in the Sands Hotel in Atlantic City, to the horror of hotel guests, who eventually prevailed upon Sands management to have the fighter take his act outside to the boardwalk.”

Despite his penchant for showmanship, Johnson hated training. He was said to smoke a pack of cigarettes every day and drink Colt 45 all night. As far as ESPN was concerned, the loss to Landini was Johnson’s swan song.

2 rounds with The Beast »

Perhaps the biggest event in Johnson’s career was a trip to Maracaibo, Venezuela, in 1984 to fight on NBC’s Sportsworld. The big network promised to show Johnson’s coffin entrance and scheduled a humorous pre-fight promo featuring Dr. Ferdie Pacheco in a cemetery.

Unfortunately, the production was disastrous. First, Johnson’s coffin couldn’t make it past customs. NBC producer Peter Rolfe reportedly went out and rented one, but on the day of the fight, Johnson simply walked to the ring in his cape, sans coffin. Also, the fight took place on election day, and officials banned public events. The show went on with only a middling audience, mostly friends of promoter Rafael Cedeno and some journalists.

Finally, Johnson’s opponent happened to be John “The Beast” Mugabi. Though the press got a lot of mileage out of “The Vampire vs. The Beast,” Johnson couldn’t capitalize on the publicity. With a beastly left hook, Mugabi knocked him out in the second.

2 rounds to eat “The Mouse.” »

In 1983 at the Sherwood Club of Indianapolis, Johnson stopped irrepressible journeyman Bruce “The Mouse” Strauss at 2:25 of Round 2. The bout ended with Strauss staggering around in a highly suspicious daze. Even promoter Fred Berns thought Strauss was acting. “Nobody, I mean nobody, bought it,” Berns said, “except the referee.”

4 bouts with Frank Lux »

Lux was one of those busy journeymen who fought everywhere, often under fake names with a fake record. Johnson beat him in all four of their bouts, three of which took place consecutively, including one where Lux fought as “Frank Williams.”

41 total fights »

Johnson (1956-2019) ended his career as a puffy cruiserweight with three consecutive losses. After his final bout in 1989, Johnson left boxing with a record of 30-8-2 (19 KOs) and one no-contest. He went off the radar, allegedly working as a bus driver in Ohio. In the end, Johnson’s gimmick overshadowed his work in the ring, though he probably enjoyed being remembered for the cape and coffin. But let’s never forget that Johnson was a boxer. Even if training was as vile to him as sunlight is to a vampire, Johnson competed – and won his share – against some solid opponents. “I love boxing,” he once said. “I’d do it even if I didn’t get paid for it.” RING

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Ring Ratings Through July 26, 2025

Floyd Schofield broke into the lightweight ratings with a first-round KO of Tevin Farmer.

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

Recent Fight Results

P4P: Shakur Stevenson (in at No. 10) **UD 12** William Zepeda
P4P: Jesse Rodriguez (No. 7, ▲+1) **TKO 10** Phumelela Cafu
H: Oleksandr Usyk (C) **KO 5** Daniel Dubois (No. 2, ▼-3)
200: Gilberto Ramirez (No. 1) **UD 12** Yuniel Dorticos
200: Michal Cieslak (No. 4, ▲+1) **TKO 4** Jean Pascal
200: Aleksei Papin (No. 3) removed for inactivity
175: David Morrell (No. 8, ▲+1) **SD 10** Imam Khataev (No. 10, ▲+2)
168: Christian Mbilli (No. 1) **TKO 1** Maciej Sulecki
168: Hamzah Sheeraz (in at No. 7) **KO 5** Edgar Berlanga
168: Diego Pacheco (No. 2) **UD 12** Trevor McCumby
168: Jaime Munguia (No. 5) removed for failed drug test, Bruno Surace reinstated at No. 7
168: Shadasia Green (No. 2, ▲C) **SD 10** Savannah Marshall (C, ▼-2)
160: Austin Williams (No. 9) **TKO 9** Ivan Vazquez
160: Shane Mosley Jr. (No. 9) removed for inactivity
160: Tamm Thibeault (in at No. 5) TKO 5 Mary Casamassa
154: Sebastian Fundora (No. 5, ▲+3) **TKO 7** Tim Tszyu (No. 7, out)
154: Xander Zayas (in at No. 8) **UD 12** Jorge Garcia Perez (No. 9, out)
147: Raul Curiel (No. 8) **KO 4** Victor Rodriguez
147: Mario Barrios (No. 3, ▼-5) **D 12** Manny Pacquiao (in at No. 9)
147: Rohan Polanco (No. 5, ▲+1) **UD 10** Quinton Randall
140: Liam Paro (No. 5) **TKO 5** Jonathan Navarro
140: Jack Catterall (No. 3) moved up in weight
140: Chantelle Cameron (No. 1) **UD 10** Jessica Camara
140: Katie Taylor (C) **MD 10** Amanda Serrano (in at No. 2)
140: Subriel Matias (No. 5, ▲+3) **MD 12** Alberto Puello (No. 2, ▼-1)
135: Floyd Schofield (in at No. 6) **KO 1** Tevin Farmer (No. 8, out)
135: Shakur Stevenson (No. 2, ▲+1) **UD 12** William Zepeda (No. 3, ▼-1)
135: Holly Holm (in at No. 5) **UD 10** Yolanda Vega
135: Frank Martin (No. 7) removed for inactivity
130: James Dickens (in at No. 10) **KO 4** Albert Batyrgaziev (No. 9, out)
130: Leila Beaudoin (No. 2, ▲+1) **TKO 6** Elhem Mekhaled
130: Alycia Baumgardner (C) **UD 10** Jennifer Miranda (No. 3)
126: Brandon Figueroa (No. 6) **UD 12** Joet Gonzalez
126: Bruce Carrington (No. 7, ▲+1) **UD 12** Mateus Heita
122: Alan Picasso (No. 5) **MD 10** Kyonosuke Kameda
122: Ellie Scotney (C) **UD 10** Yamileth Mercado (No. 1)
122: Elijah Pierce (No. 8) moved up in weight
118: Cherneka Johnson (No. 1) **TKO 9** Shuretta Metcalf (No. 3)
115: Jesse Rodriguez (C) **TKO 10** Phumelela Cafu (No. 3, ▼-1)
112: Francisco Rodriguez Jr. (No. 4) removed for failed drug test; Galal Yafai reinstated at No. 4
108: Gabriela Alaniz (No. 5, ▲+1) **TKO 5** Daiana Ortiz
102: Camila Zamorano (No. 5, ▲+1) **UD 10** Mika Iwakawa

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through July 26, 2025*

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	OLEKSANDR USYK ◆◆◆◆◆	Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
1	TYSON FURY	U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
2	▲+1 JOSEPH PARKER	New Zealand • 36-3-0 (24 KOs)
3	▲+1 AGIT KABAYEL	Germany • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
4	▼-2 DANIEL DUBOIS	U.K. • 22-3-0 (21 KOs)
5	ANTHONY JOSHUA	U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
6	FILIP HRGOVIC	Croatia • 18-1-0 (14 KOs)
7	▲+3 FABIO WARDLEY	U.K. • 19-0-1 (18 KOs)
8	▼-1 ZHILEI ZHANG	China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)
9	▼-1 MARTIN BAKOLE	Congo • 21-2-1 (16 KOs)
10	▼-1 EFE AJAGBA	Nigeria • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	JAI OPETAIA ◆◆	Australia • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
1	GILBERTO RAMIREZ ◆◆	Mexico • 48-1-0 (30 KOs)
2	CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH	U.K. • 21-2-0 (13 KOs)
3	▲+1 MICHAL CIESLAK	Poland • 28-2-0 (22 KOs)
4	▲+1 RYAN ROZICKI	Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
5	▲+1 BADOU JACK ◆	Sweden • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)
6	▲+1 NOEL MIKAELIAN	Armenia • 27-3-0 (12 KOs)
7	▲+1 YAMIL PERALTA	Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
8	▲+1 LEONARDO MOSQUEA	France • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
9	▲+1 ROBIN SIRWAN SAFAR	Sweden • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
10	★ VIDDAL RILEY	U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	DMITRY BIVOL ◆◆◆◆	Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
1	ARTUR BETERBIEV	Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
2	DAVID BENAVIDEZ ◆	U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
3	CALLUM SMITH	U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)
4	ANTHONY YARDE	U.K. • 27-3-0 (24 KOs)
5	JOSHUA BUATSI	U.K. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
6	ALBERT RAMIREZ	Venezuela • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
7	▲+1 DAVID MORRELL	Cuba • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
8	▲+2 IMAM KHATAEV	Australia • 10-1-0 (9 KOs)
9	▼-2 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK	Ukraine • 21-2-0 (17 KOs)
10	▼-1 WILLY HUTCHINSON	U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	CANELO ALVAREZ ◆◆◆◆◆	Mexico • 63-2-2 (39 KOs)
1	CHRISTIAN MBILLI	France • 29-0-0 (24 KOs)
2	DIEGO PACHECO	U.S. • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)
3	OSLEYS IGLESIAS	Cuba • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
4	JOSE ARMANDO RESENDIZ	Mexico • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
5	▲+1 CALEB PLANT	U.S. • 23-3-0 (14 KOs)
6	★ HAMZAH SHEERAZ	U.K. • 22-0-1 (18 KOs)
7	▲+3 BRUNO SURACE	France • 26-1-2 (5 KOs)
8	▼-1 WILLIAM SCULL	Cuba • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
9	▼-1 VLADIMIR SHISHKIN	Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
10	▼-1 BEKTEMIR MELIKUZIEV	Uzbekistan • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY ◆◆	Kazakhstan • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
2	CARLOS ADAMES ◆	Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
3	▲+1 ERISLANDY LARA ◆	Cuba • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)
4	▲+1 CHRIS EUBANK JR.	U.K. • 35-3-0 (25 KOs)
5	▲+1 YOENLI HERNANDEZ	Cuba • 8-0-0 (7 KOs)
6	▲+2 TROY ISLEY	U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)
7	ETINOSA OLIHA	Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)
8	▲+2 AARON MCKENNA	Ireland • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
9	★ AUSTIN WILLIAMS	U.S. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
10	★ DENZEL BENTLEY	U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	TERENCE CRAWFORD ◆	U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
2	VERGIL ORTIZ	U.S. • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)
3	▲+2 SEBASTIAN FUNDORA ◆	U.S. • 23-1-1 (15 KOs)
4	▼-1 ISRAIL MADRIMOV	Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
5	▼-1 BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV ◆	Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
6	SERHII BOHACHUK	Ukraine • 26-2-0 (24 KOs)
7	▲+1 ERICKSON LUBIN	U.S. • 27-2-0 (19 KOs)
8	★ XANDER ZAYAS ◆	Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
9	JESUS RAMOS	U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
10	★ YOENIS TELLEZ	Cuba • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C	JARON ENNIS ◆◆◆	U.S. • 34-0-0 (30 KOs)
1	BRIAN NORMAN JR. ◆	U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
2	EIMANTAS STANIONIS	Lithuania • 15-1-0 (9 KOs)
3	▲+1 GIOVANI SANTILLAN	U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
4	▲+3 ROHAN POLANCO	Dom. Rep. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
5	SHAKHRAM GIYASOV	Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
6	▲+2 ALEXIS ROCHA	U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
7	▲+2 RAUL CURIEL	Mexico • 16-0-1 (14 KOs)
8	▼-5 MARIO BARRIOS ◆	U.S. • 29-2-2 (18 KOs)
9	★ MANNY PACQUIAO	Philippines • 62-8-3 (39 KOs)
10	EKOW ESSUMAN	U.K. • 22-1-0 (8 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C	TEOFIMO LOPEZ ◆◆	U.S. • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)
1	RICHARDSON HITCHINS ◆	U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
2	▲+4 SUBRIEL MATIAS ◆	Puerto Rico • 23-2-0 (22 KOs)
3	▼-1 ALBERTO PUELLO	Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (10 KOs)
4	ARNOLD BARBOZA	U.S. • 32-1-0 (11 KOs)
5	LIAM PARO	Australia • 26-1-0 (16 KOs)
7	▲+1 GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL◆	U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
8	▲+1 SANDOR MARTIN	Spain • 42-4-0 (15 KOs)
9	▲+1 DALTON SMITH	U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
10	▲+1 ANDY HIRAOKA	Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
10	★ LINDOLFO DELGADO	Mexico • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

*Note: Changes as compared to the ratings in the July 2025 issue.

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MEN'S RING RATINGS Through July 26, 2025*

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C		(VACANT)
1	▲+2	**SHAKUR STEVENSON** ◆ U.S. • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)
2	▼-1	**GERVONTA DAVIS** ◆ U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)
3	▲+2	**RAYMOND MURATALLA** U.S. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
4		**WILLIAM ZEPEDA** Mexico • 33-0-0 (27 KOs)
5	▲+1	**ANDY CRUZ** Cuba • 5-0-0 (2 KOs)
6	★	**FLOYD SCHOFIELD** U.S. • 33-8-1 (8 KOs)
7	▲+1	**DENYS BERINCHYK** Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
8	▲+2	**SAM NOAKES** U.K. • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)
9	★	**ABDULLAH MASON** U.S. • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)
10	★	**LUCAS BAHDI** Canada • 19-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C		(VACANT)
1		**O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** ◆ U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
2		**EMANUEL NAVARRETE** ◆ Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
3		**ANTHONY CACACE** Ireland • 24-1-0 (9 KOs)
4		**LAMONT ROACH** ◆ U.S. • 25-1-2 (10 KOs)
5		**EDUARDO NUNEZ** ◆ Mexico • 28-1-0 (27 KOs)
6		**ROBSON CONCEICAO** Brazil • 19-3-1 (9 KOs)
7		**EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
8		**CHARLY SUAREZ** Philippines • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
9	▲+1	**RAYMOND FORD** U.S. • 17-1-1 (8 KOs)
10	★	**JAMES DICKENS** U.K. • 36-5-0 (15 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C		(VACANT)
1		**RAFAEL ESPINOZA** ◆ Mexico • 27-0-0 (23 KOs)
2		**ANGELO LEO** ◆ U.S. • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
3		**NICK BALL** ◆ U.K. • 22-0-1 (12 KOs)
4		**STEPHEN FULTON** ◆ U.S. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
5		**LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ** Mexico • 31-3-0 (18 KOs)
6	▲+1	**BRUCE CARRINGTON** U.S. • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
7	▼-1	**BRANDON FIGUEROA** U.S. • 26-2-1 (19 KOs)
8		**MIRCO CUELLO** Argentina • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
9		**ROBEISY RAMIREZ** Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
10		**NATHANIEL COLLINS** U.K. • 17-0-0 (8 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C		**NAOYA INOUE** ◆◆◆◆◆ Japan • 30-0-0 (27 KOs)
1		**MARLON TAPALES** Philippines • 40-4-0 (21 KOs)
2		**MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** Uzbekistan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
3		**LUIS NERY** Mexico • 36-2-0 (28 KOs)
4		**SAM GOODMAN** Australia • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
5		**ALAN PICASSO** Mexico • 32-0-1 (17 KOs)
6		**SHABAZ MASOUD** U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
7		**TJ DOHENY** Ireland • 26-6-0 (20 KOs)
8	▲+1	**RAMON CARDENAS** U.S. • 26-2-0 (14 KOs)
9	▲+1	**SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ** Mexico • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)
10	★	**SUBARU MURATA** Japan • 10-0-0 (10 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C	▲+1	**JUNTO NAKATANI** ◆◆◆ Japan • 31-0-0 (24 KOs)
1	▲+2	**SEIYA TSUTSUMI** ◆ Japan • 12-0-3 (8 KOs)
2	▲+2	**YOSHIKI TAKEI** ◆ Japan • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
3	▼-1	**RYOSUKE NISHIDA** Japan • 10-1-0 (2 KOs)
4	▲+1	**TAKUMA INOUE** Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
5	▲+1	**DAIGO HIGA** Japan • 21-3-2 (19 KOs)
6	▲+1	**TENSHIN NASUKAWA** Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
7	▲+1	**JASON MOLONEY** Australia • 27-4-0 (19 KOs)
8	▲+1	**JEYVIER CINTRON** Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)
9	▲+1	**KENNETH LLOVER** Philippines • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
10	★	**ANTONIO VARGAS** U.S. • 19-1-0 (11 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C		**JESSE RODRIGUEZ** ◆◆◆ U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
1		**FERNANDO MARTINEZ** ◆ Argentina • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)
2	▲+1	**KAZUTO IOKA** Japan • 31-4-1 (16 KOs)
3	▲+3	**CARLOS CUADRAS** Mexico • 44-5-1 (28 KOs)
4		**PHUMELELE CAFU** S. Africa • 11-1-3 (8 KOs)
5	▲+2	**ANDREW MOLONEY** Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)
6	▲+2	**DAVID JIMENEZ** Costa Rica • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
7	▲+2	**PEDRO GUEVARA** Mexico • 43-5-1 (22 KOs)
8	▲+2	**WILLIBALDO GARCIA** Mexico • 23-6-2 (13 KOs)
9	★	**RICARDO MALAJIKA** S. Africa • 15-2-0 (11 KOs)
10	★	**RENE CALIXTO BIBIANO** Mexico • 23-1-1 (9 KOs)

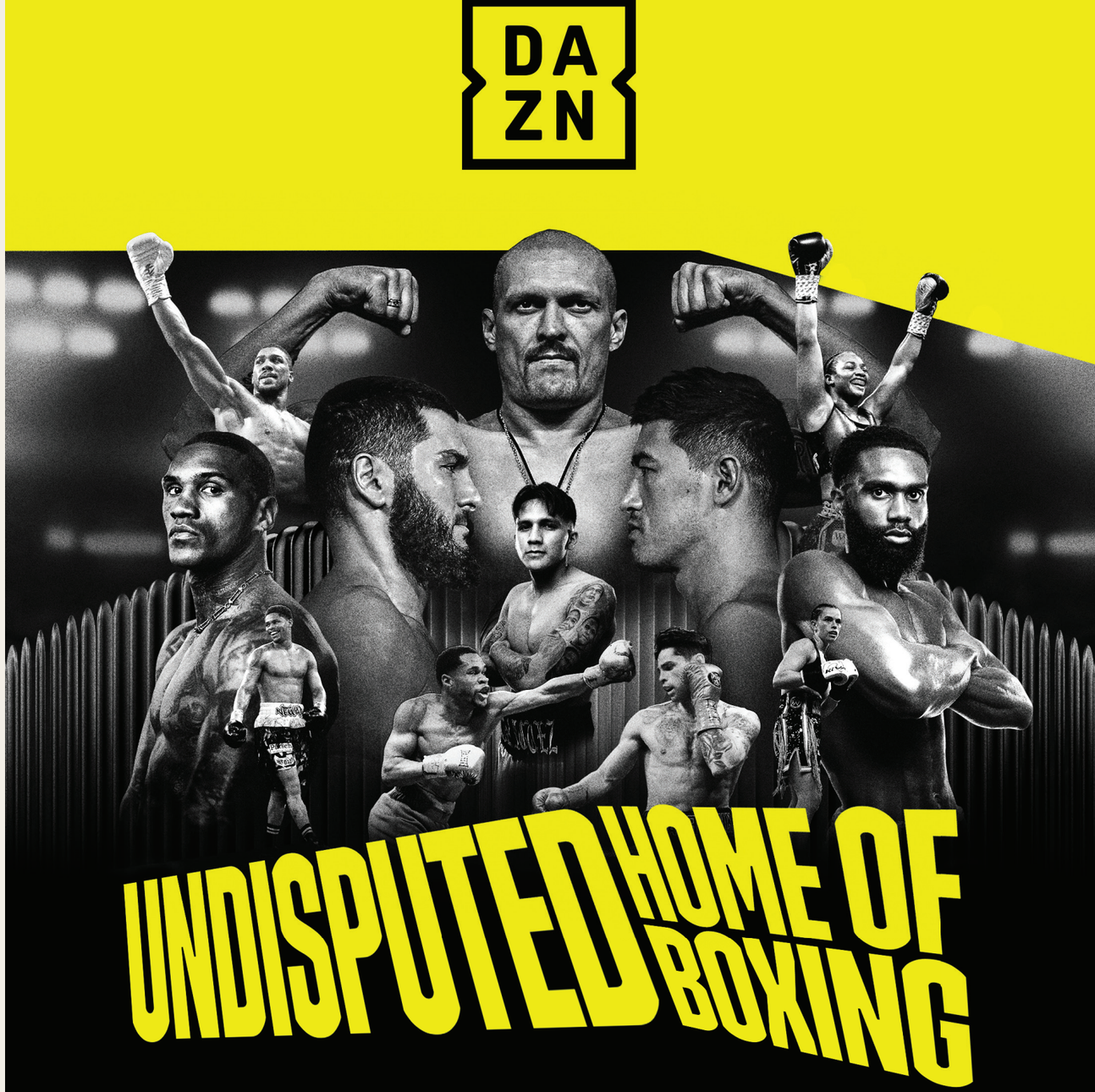
FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C		(VACANT)
1		**KENSHIRO TERAJI** ◆◆ Japan • 25-1-0 (16 KOs)
2		**SEIGO YURI AKUI** Japan • 21-3-1 (11 KOs)
3		**MASAMICHI YABUKI** ◆ Japan • 18-4-0 (17 KOs)
4		**GALAL YAFAI** U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
5		**RICARDO SANDOVAL** U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
6		**ANGEL AYALA** Mexico • 18-1-0 (8 KOs)
7		**FELIX ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
8		**ANTHONY OLASCUAGA** ◆ U.S. • 9-1-0 (6 KOs)
9	▲+1	**TOBIAS REYES** Argentina • 17-1-1 (16 KOs)
10	★	**JUKIYA IIMURA** Japan • 9-1-0 (2 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C		(VACANT)
1		**RENE SANTIAGO** ◆ Puerto Rico • 14-4-0 (9 KOs)
2	▲+3	**THANONGSAK SIMSRI** Thailand • 39-1-0 (34 KOs)
3	▼-1	**SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA** S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
4	▼-1	**SHOKICHI IWATA** Japan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
5	▼-1	**CARLOS CANIZALES** Venezuela • 27-3-1 (19 KOs)
6	▲+1	**REGIE SUGANOB** Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
7	▼-1	**CRISTIAN ARANETA** Philippines • 25-3-0 (20 KOs)
8		**ERICK ROSA** ◆ Dom. Rep. • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)
9		**PANYA PRADABSRI** ◆ Thailand • 44-2-0 (27 KOs)
10		**KYOSUKE TAKAMI** Japan • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

*Note: Changes as compared to the ratings in the July 2025 issue.



MEN'S RING RATINGS Through July 26, 2025*

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

STRAWWEIGHTS

WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **OSCAR COLLAZO** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)

1 **MELVIN JERUSALEM** ◆
Philippines • 24-3-0 (12 KOs)

2 **PEDRO TADURAN** ◆
Philippines • 18-4-1 (13 KOs)

3 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
Thailand • 27-1-0 (10 KOs)

4 **YUDAI SHIGEOKA**
Japan • 9-2-0 (5 KOs)

5 **SIYAKHOLWA KUSE**
S. Africa • 9-2-1 (4 KOs)

6 **DIANXING ZHU**
China • 14-1-0 (12 KOs)

7 **YUNI TAKADA**
Japan • 16-8-3 (6 KOs)

9 ▲+1 **RYUSEI MATSUMOTO** ★
Japan • 6-0-0 (4 KOs)

8 ▼-1 **JOEY CANOY**
Philippines • 24-5-2 (15 KOs)

10 **VIC SALUDAR**
Philippines • 26-6-0 (16 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

MEN

1 **OLEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 30-0-0 (27 KOs)

3 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)

4 **DMITRY BIVOL**
Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

5 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)

6 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

7 **JUNTO NAKATANI**
Japan • 31-0-0 (24 KOs)

8 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 63-2-2 (39 KOs)

9 **KENSHIRO TERAJI**
Japan • 25-1-0 (16 KOs)

10 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)

Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez is closing in on a Top 5 rating on the P4P list.

WOMEN

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (3 KOs)

3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)

4 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)

5 **DINA THORSLUND**
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)

6 **GABRIELA FUNDORA**
U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)

7 **LAUREN PRICE**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)

8 **YOKASTA VALLE**
Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)

9 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)

10 **TINA RUPPRECHT**
Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)

Melina Pizano

*Note: Changes as compared to the ratings in the July 2025 issue.

WOMEN'S RING RATINGS Through July 26, 2025*

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆RING ◆IBF ◆WBA ◆WBC ◆WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C ▲+2 **SHADASIA GREEN** ◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
1 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** ◆◆
U.S. • 10-2-0 (2 KOs)
2 ▼-2 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
3 **LANI DANIELS**
New Zealand • 11-3-2 (1 KO)
4 **MARY CASAMASSA**
U.S. • 6-1-0 (1 KO)
5 **CITLALLI ORTIZ**
Mexico • 4-2-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 17-0-0 (3 KOs)
1 **DESLEY ROBINSON** ◆◆
Australia • 10-3-0 (3 KOs)
2 **MELINDA WATPOOL**
Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **MAPULE NGUBANE**
S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
4 **ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO**
Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
5 ★ **TAMM THIBEAULT**
Canada • 3-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C. **(VACANT)**
1 **OSHAE JONES** ◆
U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)
2 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
3 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
4 **MARY SPENCER** ◆
Canada • 10-2-0 (6 KOs)
5 **PRISCILLA PETERLE**
France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **LAUREN PRICE** ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
1 **MIKAELA MAYER** ◆
U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)
2 **NATASHA JONAS**
U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
3 **SANDY RYAN**
U.K. • 7-3-1 (3 KOs)
4 **MICHAELA KOTASKOVA**
Czech Rep. • 10-0-2 (4 KOs)
5 **STEPHANIE AQUINO**
Puerto Rico • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** ◆◆◆◆◆
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)
1 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)
2 ★ **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
3 ▼-1 **SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 ▼-1 **FLORA PILI**
France • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
5 ▼-1 **ELIZABETH OSHOBA**
Nigeria • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C. **(VACANT)**
1 **CAROLINE DUBOIS** ◆
U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOs)
2 ▲+1 **BEATRIZ FERREIRA** ◆
Brazil • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 ▼-1 **TERRI HARPER** ◆
U.K. • 16-2-2 (6 KOs)
4 **RHIANNON DIXON**
U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
5 ★ **HOLLY HOLM**
U.S. • 34-2-3 (9 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** ◆◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (7 KOs)
1 ▲+1 **LEILA BEAUDOIN**
Canada • 13-1-0 (2 KOs)
2 ▼-1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 49-3-0 (19 KOs)
3 **JENNIFER MIRANDA**
Spain • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
4 **MEA MOTU**
New Zealand • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 **RIMA AYADI**
France • 11-0-0 (1 KO)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **AMANDA SERRANO** ◆◆◆
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
1 **TIARA BROWN** ◆
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 **NINA MEINKE** ◆
German • 20-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 **SKYE NICOLSON**
Australia • 13-1-0 (2 KOs)
4 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
Argentina • 32-6-3 (12 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **ELLIE SCOTNEY** ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 11-0-0 (0 KOs)
1 **YAMILETH MERCADO**
Mexico • 24-4-0 (5 KOs)
2 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
3 **MAYELLI FLORES ROSQUERO** ◆
Mexico • 13-1-1 (4 KOs)
4 **ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 18-2-1 (4 KOs)
5 **NAZARENA ROMERO**
Argentina • 14-1-2 (8 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **DINA THORSLUND** ◆◆◆
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 **CHERNEKA JOHNSON** ◆◆
Australia • 18-2-0 (8 KOs)
2 ▲+2 **DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 34-4-1 (5 KOs)
3 **SHURRETTA METCALF**
U.S. • 14-5-1 (2 KOs)
4 ★ **FLORENCIA JUAREZ**
Argentina • 13-1-0 (1 KO)
5 ★ **JOHANNA WONYOU**
France • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **MIZUKI HIRUTA** ◆◆
Japan • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **GINNY FUCHS**
U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
2 **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
U.S. • 16-1-1 (8 KOs)
3 **ASLEY GONZALEZ** ◆
Mexico • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 **CARLA MERINO**
Argentina • 16-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 **EMMA DOLAN**
U.K. • 8-0-0 (1 KO)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **GABRIELA FUNDORA** ◆◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO**
Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
3 **JASMINA ZAPOTOCZNA**
U.K. • 9-1-0 (0 KOs)
4 **MARILYN BADILLO AMAYA**
Mexico • 19-1-1 (3 KOs)
5 **ALEXAS KUBIKI**
Canada • 13-1-0 (2 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **EVELIN BERMUDEZ** ◆◆
Argentina • 21-1-1 (7 KOs)
2 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 21-2-0 (3 KOs)
3 **LOURDES JUAREZ** ◆
Mexico • 38-4-0 (5 KOs)
4 ▲+1 **GABRIELA ALANIZ**
Argentina • 17-2-0 (7 KOS)
5 ▼-1 **SARA BAILEY** ◆
Canada • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **YOKASTA VALLE** ◆
Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
2 **SARAH BORMANN** ◆
Germany • 20-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 **YUKO KUROKI** ◆
Japan • 25-8-2 (10 KOs)
4 **SOL CUDOS** ◆
Argentina • 10-0-2 (3 KOs)
5 **SOL BAUMSTARH**
Argentina • 13-7-1 (8 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **TINA RUPPRECHT** ◆◆◆◆◆
Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)
1 **SUMIRE YAMANAKA**
Japan • 8-1-0 (3 KOs)
2 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 7-2-1 (1 KO)
3 **ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS**
Mexico • 10-0-1 (0 KOs)
4 ▲+1 **CAMILA ZAMORANO**
Mexico • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
5 ▼-1 **NAO UGAWA**
Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)

*Note: Changes as compared to the ratings in the July 2025 issue.

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MIKE DROP

BOXING AT ITS BEST

By Mike Coppinger

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy/Getty Images

The habitually durable Berlanga couldn't handle Sheeraz's power.

Hamzah Sheeraz dropped to his knees in a heap of emotion, the exclamation point on a May night in New York City that featured eight boxers with something to prove. Better yet, they all fought like it.

In boxing, you can make matchups that look great on paper, but the styles must mesh inside the ring. Not just the way the athletes fight, but the passion (or lack thereof) they exude.

The Ring's first stateside offering, in which a ring was erected literally in the middle of Times Square, also featured a host of fighters looking to reclaim status. Only those fighters, by and large, lacked urgency inside the squared circle.

Ryan Garcia was listless in the final fight of the night as he was floored in Round 2 and then rarely threw combinations in a dreary upset loss to Rolly Romero. Garcia was competing for the first time since his one-year ban was lifted for performance-enhancing drug use.

That was in connection with what was his career-best victory, an April 2024 fight where he dropped Devin Haney three times. The majority decision was overturned to a no contest. Haney, too, fought with little fire as he cruised to a wide decision win over Jose Ramirez in the Times Square event.

Two months later and seven miles to the east in Queens, at the site of the annual U.S. Open of tennis, The Ring delivered a rare show, one where all four featured fights delivered action, drama and entertainment. How often does that happen?

Sure, there might be some perceived bias when talking about an event with our logo on it, but in this case, there were no shortcomings to spin. This was boxing at its best; even the critics agreed.

Sheeraz was looking to rebound from February's draw with Carlos Adames in Riyadh. The court of public opinion said it was a gift for the Englishman, that Adames deserved the decision.

Sheeraz listened as he was called a fraud and then laughed in the face of his polar-opposite foe, Edgar Berlanga. Berlanga crowned himself the King of New York and vowed to finish off Sheeraz with a spectacular knockout in the early going.

It was Berlanga who was planted on the canvas twice. The second time, he was deposited face-first just in front of me as I sat on the apron for ringside commentary. I was surprised – and impressed – that Berlanga beat the count.

He wasn't happy with me saying that I believed he was just there to survive against Canelo Alvarez in September 2024 – a fight Canelo won by a very wide unanimous decision. Against Sheeraz, he might have lost, but he left no doubt about his fighting spirit.

Now it's Sheeraz who could land his own shot against boxing's top star following the fifth-round TKO. During our post-fight interview, he called for the opportunity, and there are plans to make it happen in February, when Alvarez is slated for the third fight of his Riyadh Season deal.

Sheeraz looked like a new fighter both in his first bout at 168 pounds and with trainer Andy Lee. With his good looks, charisma and knockout power, Sheeraz has a genuine chance to reach stardom. He doesn't need to defeat Canelo; he just needs to fight him and make a good account of himself.

"Canelo's always been a boxing hero of mine," Sheeraz told me. "So even for my name to be mentioned in the same sentence as his, that's a great achievement [for] myself. If I do get the opportunity to fight him, it won't be one of those where I try to nick it on points. I will stand in the middle with him and have it out. And whoever lands first, I suppose [they] get knocked out, don't they?"

Music to the ears of boxing fans, and especially Canelo after what he endured with William Scull in Riyadh the night after Times Square.

Shakur Stevenson was another fighter with plenty to prove. There's little doubt about his tremendous boxing ability, but he hasn't always entertained, even when his opponents were overmatched. Shakur played along as Turki Alalshikh called for the end of "Tom and Jerry fights" as Stevenson wore a hat depicting the classic cartoon at the weigh-in.

In the ring, Stevenson thrilled fans with his ability to make William Zepeda miss and make him pay. That second part is key. Stevenson never had any issues evading punches. This time, he punished his foe, one who had long waited for a shot at Stevenson's WBC lightweight title.

The Ring's next installment of fights, on November 22 in Riyadh, has a lot to live up to.

Zepeda was fighting on the elite level for the first time, and while he suffered his first career defeat, he showed he could hang with the best. His nonstop pressure and relentless pursuit has made him one of boxing's top action fighters, and the performance only strengthened that status.

The other title fight on the card was arguably the best of the night: a back-and-forth battle between Alberto Puello and Subriel Matias for the WBC junior welterweight title.

Matias was written off by many observers and fans after his lackluster decision loss to Liam Paro, who the Puerto Rican conceded was an inferior boxer to Puello, in June 2024. Against Puello, Matias was up for the task as he pulled out a close decision win in a grueling fight to become a two-time titleholder.

During our post-fight interview, we welcomed Dalton Smith to face off with Matias. Smith is the WBC mandatory, and that fight is now planned for November in Riyadh, with Puello in line for the winner. It's a refreshing wrinkle that's not used nearly often enough in boxing: setting up the next fight right then and there while momentum is high.

Too often, a fighter scores a big win and then you sit around and wonder for months what's next. Not this time.

The first of the four featured bouts was another slugfest that could have gone either way. David Morrell was coming off the first loss of his career, a spirited decision setback to David Benavidez in February. Usually such rising stars on the heels of a defeat will ease back in.

Morrell enjoyed no such luxury against rugged Russian puncher Imam Khataev. Khataev didn't arrive in New York until days before the fight as he dealt with visa issues, but there were no signs of trouble in the ring. He dropped the decision but scored a knockdown (the first of Morrell's career) and will no doubt be back in another big fight.

As for the Cuban, Morrell could be lined up for a fight with former champion Callum Smith. And most of all, he showed that the traditional boxing method of babying fighters following losses is unnecessary. Now the loss to Benavidez is a distant memory and we're only thinking of his fantastic action win and what's next.

The Ring's next installment of fights, on November 22 in Riyadh, has a lot to live up to.

But on paper, the four scheduled title fights all promise to deliver action. Benavidez will defend against Anthony Yarde, Haney will meet Brian Norman, and Abdullah Mason will face Sam Noakes. In addition, Bam Rodriguez will defend his Ring Magazine championship vs. fellow titleholder Fernando Martinez.

The fighters have been presented with an opportunity and, as we know too well, it's now up to them to deliver. Just as they did on a July evening in Queens.

Mike Coppinger is The Ring's senior insider. He was previously ESPN's lead boxing reporter. Follow him on X/Instagram: @MikeCoppinger.

SAME SKILLS NEW THRILLS

BY ELECTING TO STAND HIS GROUND AGAINST THE RAMPAGING WILLIAM ZEPEDA, **SHAKUR STEVENSON** COUNTERED THE CRITICS AND SHOWED THE ENTIRE BOXING WORLD JUST HOW SPECIAL HE CAN BE

By Tom Gray

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy/Getty Images

Over the past eight years, Shakur Stevenson has experienced nothing but success in the ring. A three-weight titleholder with a perfect 24-0 record, the super-skilled southpaw from Newark is widely regarded as one of the finest pound-for-pound fighters in the world today.

However, sometimes you can be too perfect. Stevenson has so much ring intelligence and defensive finesse that he can make world-class opponents look mediocre. The big punchers can't land a decisive blow, while the boxers struggle desperately to impose their skills against him. The downside of that in the past was that Stevenson's victories began to feel repetitive to the point where some fans bitterly demanded action.

Enter top lightweight contender William Zepeda.

With a 33-0 record, Zepeda possessed a pressure-packed, high-volume fighting style that Stevenson hadn't encountered as a professional. At 29 years old, the Mexican contender was in his prime, loaded with confidence and hungry to separate the WBC 135-pound titleholder from his senses.

On July 12 at the Louis Armstrong Stadium in Queens, New York, Stevenson sent a powerful message to everyone in boxing, especially Zepeda. Instead of using quick feet to stay away, he stood in the pocket, rolled with the punches and released sharp counters. Instead of pot-shotting his way to victory, Stevenson strung together multi-punch combinations designed to do damage. He was sizzling!

While the scoring was too wide for some, Stevenson proved that he was the better man by far and claimed a lopsided 12-round unanimous decision triumph (119-109, 118-110, 118-110). This was the best the young American hotshot has looked since he defrocked the previously unbeaten Oscar Valdez in a junior lightweight unification fight in April 2022.

Stevenson made his point with a spirited and skilled display.

It's not always about if you win, it's about how you win, and fight fans around the world were dazzled by Stevenson's display. The "runner" tag has now taken a back seat, while genuine excitement surrounds what's potentially coming next as Stevenson plots his course through arduous lightweight terrain.

The Ring caught up with the 135-pound king, who was not at a loss for words about Zepeda, potential future opponents, his good friend Terence Crawford, and, oh … Sugar Ray Robinson:

The Ring: Shakur, congratulations on the victory. Can you break down the Zepeda performance for me? Did everything go as planned?

Shakur Stevenson: Everything did go as planned, but I'm not a fan of my own performances, so I'm a hard critic of myself. I saw a lot of things that I can work on. It was an OK performance, but I appreciate the fans for realizing that I'm a lot different from what they thought. There's definitely room for improvement, though.

The Ring: What are the things that you could have improved upon?

SS: I could have had a little bit more water, man. (laughs) We were fighting in the heat and I don't think I hydrated properly. I should have focused on that a little more. It's the little things. My IQ is there and my skills are there, one hundred percent. It was just the rehydration part. I could have handled that a bit different.

The Ring: This fight had been eagerly anticipated for some time. Zepeda was the No. 1 challenger with all four governing bodies. How did you feel after securing victory?

SS: I felt good. Zepeda is a helluva fighter, and I got to give him credit. I ain't never been in there with a fighter that punched on my body as much as he did, so I felt that after the fight. I was very sore.

I'm not saying he's the most skillful guy, but he's got more will and heart than a lot of these fighters that I've ever been in the ring with. He wanted to win, so I respect him.

The Ring: Zepeda did have success, and we're not accustomed to seeing you absorb punishment. How long did it take for you to recover from the fight?

SS: I wasn't hurt at all. It wasn't that I had to recover from anything. It was a fight, so I had to stay strong mentally and trust in my conditioning, because the fight started fast in the first three rounds. I give him credit for that, too; he kind of forced me to fight at a faster pace. By the third round, I'm like, 'Goddamn, we got how many more rounds to go?' I had to trust in my conditioning and knew I was in good shape. I knew he'd tire out before me.

"My IQ is 100 years above these fighters and it'll take me above them every time."

The Ring: Did Zepeda surprise you with anything else that he did?

SS: He was exactly what I expected and what I prepared for. The only thing that surprised me was the subtle defensive moves he made. He would do little defensive things to make me miss some of the big shots I was throwing. I was thinking that every time I load up, I was going to hit him, but he made defensive moves that I do give him credit for.

The Ring: What did you do after the fight? Was it party time in New York?

SS: No, I'm not big on partying. I will party, but that ain't the first thing I think about. I want to spend time with my family. You gotta realize, with these training camps, you're away from your family for so long, my first instinct is to go chill with my daughter. I like to enjoy her company, so we had a 24-hour car trip from New York to Houston.

The Ring: What was the punishment for your daughter interrupting your post-fight interview?

SS: She ain't had no iPad for a week … Nah, I'm just bullshitting. No punishment. There should have been something for jumping in my damn interview. (laughs) No, my baby is just very intelligent. She had a good time and was just showing how intelligent she is. I appreciate her.

The Ring: If you had to select your number one asset in the ring, what would it be?

SS: My IQ. My IQ is higher than everybody's. I mean, even yesterday, I was watching boxing, critiquing opponents that I'll probably fight in the future. I was studying them and picking up on the things that they do wrong.

With the Zepeda fight, if you paid attention, I was telling you exactly how the fight was going to go. I explained that Zepeda was the kind of guy who would take me to another level and bring out a side of me that the world hadn't seen. It happened just like I said.

My IQ is 100 years above these fighters and it'll take me above them every time.

The Ring: What fighters were you watching yesterday?

SS: (smiles) I can't tell nobody. I gotta keep it to myself; it's a secret. We'll see when my next fight is announced. But, yeah, I've been paying attention to one of the opponents that I'll be fighting.

The Ring: You're so defensively sound that I've never seen you truly hammered by a power punch. Have you ever been dazed or shaken up?

SS: No, I ain't never been dazed. I've been caught with body punches that I've felt, but other than that, nothing. I'm actually kind of curious to see what it feels like, because everybody explains it to me in a certain way. I hope it happens one day, then I'll show you that I can recover.

The Ring: Don't you have any concerns about facing it when the time comes?

SS: No, I've got the toughness and the durability. I train so hard and put myself through all of this torture and pain, so I'm prepared. If somebody brings something, I'll counter it, and if I do get buzzed or hurt, then my

training will take over when it happens … if it happens.

The Ring: I'm going to read a quote and I want you to guess who said it: "I honestly believe that anything I do in the ring will not be appreciated. I've been dealing with this for too long to think otherwise."
SS: Maybe Floyd [Mayweather]?

The Ring: No, it's someone else you know very well.
SS: Bud Crawford?

The Ring: Yes, I spoke to Terence Crawford, who is a great friend of yours. I got the impression that Bud is almost obsessed with proving himself and proving other people wrong. Can you relate?
SS: Yeah … I ain't gonna say that I got it from him, because I've always been that kind of person who likes to prove people wrong, but I came up under Bud Crawford. I'm gonna be real with you. A lot of the years that I came up under him, I was watching the things he would do. I'm not saying we're the same type of person – we're a lot different – but in that aspect, we are the same. If you tell us that something can't happen or there's something we can't do, we have to try and do it just because y'all say we can't. We just want to prove you wrong. Even when me and him talk, there's times when he'll tell me I can't do certain things, or I can't beat him at something. We're both like, 'OK, let's go do it right now.' We are the same that way, but we're different, too. I still aspire to be as great as Bud Crawford.

The Ring: And that's the same with great champions from the past, right? Sugar Ray Leonard being told that he couldn't beat Marvin Hagler, or Roy Jones being told that he couldn't compete at heavyweight?
SS: Yeah, for sure, but I don't know those guys. I've seen their careers and they're great fighters, but I know Bud Crawford. I know that's a special individual; that's somebody like I've never seen in my lifetime. I'm around normal people on an everyday basis, and it just doesn't feel like he's a normal person. Everybody's human, but his mentality is in a whole different atmosphere. I'm like, "Dawg, you good at everything!" I've been doing this for years, and that's a special individual right there.

"If you tell us that something can't happen or there's something we can't do, we have to try and do it just because y'all say we can't. We just want to prove you wrong."

The Ring: Your style switch with Zepeda, was that permanent or was that what was required on fight night?
SS: I do whatever it takes to win a fight, whether I gotta dig down deep and dog it out or whether I gotta outbox a guy. I think my special attribute is my IQ, so whatever it takes to win.

Like, I'm not going to fight Gervonta Davis the same way I fought William Zepeda. I knew Zepeda was gonna come at me and throw a million punches a round, so I had to fight him a certain way to make sure I was victorious.

We'll see [what style I use in the future]. I love being exciting for the fans, but I won't sacrifice winning the fight, because my priority is coming home victorious.

The Ring: That ability to adapt is the hallmark of a truly great fighter, right?
SS: Yeah, that's what makes me who I am. I came up studying these guys. I watched the Sugar Ray Leonards. I watched the Roy Joneses. I watched the Floyd Mayweathers. The people that I gravitate towards. The Lomachenkos, the Usyks. I'm watching these guys because their IQs are levels above.

Going back to Zepeda, he expected that Tom and Jerry fight. If you listen to his interviews, he expected me to move around and said he'd have to cut the ring off. Everyone was telling me to start slow. But with me, I like to do the unexpected. Coming out to mix it up with him and see who punched the hardest threw him off guard, and he was the one that died [stamina-wise] late in the fight.

The Ring: When I mention Gervonta Davis to you now, what goes through your mind?
SS: It's the best fight in boxing. The dude don't give me no credit, and I like that because I like to earn my respect. When we fight, he's gonna respect me in that ring.

But I'm not gonna be that guy who tells you he's not good or that he only knocks out bums. I mean, I could mention weight clauses. There's a hundred different things that I could say about him, but I know that he's the truth.

With or without weight restrictions, he got real skill, he got real power, he got real IQ. Honestly, I feel as though it's one of the best fights in boxing. It's two guys with the highest IQ versus each other, and let's see who's victorious. I promise I'll be the one who comes out victorious, though.

The Ring: Did Lamont Roach expose Tank? (Their March 1 bout was declared a 12-round majority draw.) Was it an off night for Tank, or was Roach overlooked to the extreme?
SS: (shaking head sternly) Very much, Lamont Roach was overlooked. I made so much money that night. I knew exactly how the fight was gonna go, and I knew how Tank looked at that fight.

Zepeda was nailed flush throughout the fast-paced 12-rounder.

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

Tank would have had respect because he's known him since he was a kid, but when you see Lamont Roach lose to Jamel Herring, it gives you confidence.

Lamont Roach is the real deal – he's the truth – and what helped him in that fight is that he's a big 130. The 135-pound division fits him more than it fits me or Tank. He's bigger than both of us. That night was all Lamont Roach. You seen his skills and you've seen how good he was. I'm taking nothing away from Tank; he just went up against a good fighter and it showed.

The Ring: Your fight against Floyd Schofield fell through earlier this year. He's since created a stir by blasting out Tevin Farmer in a round, so would you be interested in getting that fight back on?

SS: I'll fight anybody, I ain't gonna lie to you. (laughs) I know these guys can't beat me. Me at 100% versus them at 100%, none of these guys stand a chance against me.

The problem with the Floyd Schofield shit is that he's so disrespectful. He went on social media and lied over and over and over and over … You ain't gotta do that when you're in business.

If we're being realistic, I didn't even have to fight Floyd Schofield. All the people, the higher-ups, were telling me not to fight him. They were saying he sucks, he's not good, and I said, "Well, he keeps talking, so let's make the fight happen." I got the fight done. I talked Turki [Alalshikh] and Eddie [Hearn] into making the fight happen.

It felt like a slap in the face when Floyd Schofield started going on social media every single day and lied on my name, saying I'd sent someone to do something to him. It just felt so disrespectful. Boxing is a business, so do you really want to go back into business with these bullshit-ass people?

You've got to let me think about fighting him again. Maybe if he keeps doing what he's doing, we can put something in the contract where he can't just go abusing my name on social media. Truthfully, I could be suing him, but I'm not about going to court.

Zepeda had pockets of success when Stevenson was on the ropes.

Let's see if he can make a real statement. I'm not taking away from the Tevin Farmer win, but I don't think he got the best version of Tevin Farmer.

[*Editor's note: Floyd Schofield alleged that he was poisoned by Stevenson's team during fight week, which led to him being hospitalized and the fight being canceled. Schofield later retracted the comments.*]

The Ring: What are your thoughts on Oleksandr Usyk after the rematch victory over Daniel Dubois?

SS: I think he's amazing. He's different. Let me tell you why he's next-level. Let me tell you why he's the highest level of boxing there is. I came up in the era where Tyson Fury was the main heavyweight. For Usyk to go beat Tyson Fury not once, but twice, I think he's something different.

Oleksandr Usyk is one of the best heavyweights I've seen with my own two eyes. A lot of people don't want to give him that credit. This guy won the Olympics, the World Championships three times, and he's a two-division undisputed champion. He's just something that we've never seen before, and he's doing all this at 38 years old.

Against Dubois, it was the skills more than anything else. Usyk had him mentally exhausted. You're in the ring with this guy, you can't do nuthin' with him, and he's touching you anytime he wants to. It got to the point that mentally Daniel Dubois knocked himself out. (laughs) It was just getting worse and worse.

The Ring: I'm not going to go too in-depth into the Sugar Ray Robinson controversy that erupted recently, because you addressed it on social media. Can you give me some of the legendary fighters that you are a fan of?

SS: You can go there. No disrespect to Sugar Ray Robinson, because he is a helluva fighter with his power and athleticism. I wasn't saying it in that way; it was more like a barbershop conversation. I'm so competitive and trying to win debates. I didn't mean that he's not a good fighter; he's a helluva fighter, but I do think boxing has evolved.

In Robinson's time, I don't think boxing was as good as it is in our time. I just feel like certain fighters didn't pick their hands up and always had their hands down. It's good to have that shoulder roll, but sometimes you should have your hands up, too.

Fighters that I looked at: I like [Muhammad] Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard … I love Sugar Ray Leonard, I think he's a beast. I like Roberto Duran. I like Pernell Whitaker.

The Ring: Why does Ali stand out for you?

SS: I think it's because Ali was a heavyweight, but he had the skills of a little guy. He would probably tell you that he watched Sugar Ray Robinson and that Sugar Ray Robinson was the greatest, and I can't take nuthin' away from his opinion.

And the era with Sugar Ray Leonard, Roberto Duran, Tommy Hearns, that was one of the best eras I've ever seen.

The Ring: One thing I'll put to you on Robinson is that most of what we have in terms of footage is after he's been at his very best. His welterweight fights – Kid Gavilan, Tommy Bell, the early Jake LaMotta fights – none of them were televised. By the time he's at middleweight, Robinson is almost 30 years old with 100-odd fights and a lot of wear and tear.

SS: Yeah, that must be it. It looked like he was a little bit older. Again, some of the stuff I watched, I'm not saying he wasn't great. He definitely was great. I just wasn't a fan of him, I guess.

The Ring: What's next for Shakur Stevenson? I would assume you would want to get back out before the end of the year?

SS: Probably not. I got hand problems, so I want to rest. People won't even know this, but this is a true story: I didn't want the [Zepeda] fight for July 12. I told them I would rather fight on the Bud-Canelo card. I felt that I needed more time to get my hands back together, but they pushed for it. It was like, 'You fight Zepeda in July, or Zepeda fights someone else!' But I didn't want him to fight nobody else, so it was like, go get the moment. Forget about your hands, just go get the moment. So, now I'm going to let my hands rest for a little bit, allow them to heal up so that when I use them, I can use them at 100%.

The Ring: That's a bit of a revelation, because you were landing big combinations. Were you uncomfortable in the fight?

SS: Shout-out to my hand-wrapper, Rafael Garcia Jr. He did a tremendous job. Floyd [Mayweather] used [Garcia's] dad as a hand-wrapper. Also, a big shout-out to Russ Anber with Rival, who got us some gloves to wear and protected my hands more. Those guys did a tremendous job with this fight.

With rest and recovery, I think it'll make my hands feel a whole lot better.

The Ring: You're only 28 years old and already a three-weight world champion and a pound-for-pound entrant. What more do you want to accomplish?

SS: I used to be a person who loved the titles and the accolades. As I've got older, I'm starting to realize that you don't get as much credit for that stuff as you should. For me now, I've switched my mindset to where I just want to fight the best fighters. I want to be in the ring with the best competition available. That's my goal.

I don't care about undisputed. I don't care about unified – I've unified before. I've also seen undisputed champions who I thought were just garbage and trash. They're not really good fighters; they just got opportunities and took advantage.

The Ring: Who are we talking about?

SS: George Kambosos.

The Ring: Well, he almost became undisputed, right? There was political stuff going on around the WBC.

SS: Devin [Haney] had the WBC regular or something, so [Kambosos] was undisputed, and once I seen that … Like I say, good job taking advantage of the opportunity, but I don't think he's a good fighter. So it doesn't mean as much as it used to.

With me, like I say, just put me in the ring with the best. If I end up fighting for undisputed, that would be cool, but I would rather focus on getting in the ring with the best guys that the public think can beat me. That's what would make me a big, big superstar.

HOW TO WATCH BOXING:

CUTTING OFF THE RING

By Brian Harty

Pre-fight analysts often mention "cutting off the ring" as a key to victory for one fighter or the other, but there's rarely much explanation of what it is or how it's done. That's partly because the concept seems so obvious: If somebody you're attempting to hit isn't volunteering to stand still, you steer them into places that limit their mobility. Whenever they try to go somewhere you don't want them to go, you cut them off.

While that works fine as a description for road rage, cutting off the ring is more complicated. It's not just about bullying your opponent into a corner or heading them off at the pass. Rather, it's a gradual, cerebral process in which multiple skills converge and allow a boxer to write the entire narrative of a fight – most importantly, how it ends.

Spotting a fighter who does it well starts before they even get to the cutting part.

"I see them reading the opponent, first of all," says trainer Abel Sanchez. He mentions Orlin Norris (as well as his brother, Hall of Famer Terry Norris) and future Hall of Famer Gennadiy Golovkin as some of the exceptionally talented ring-cutters he has coached. "They were so calm in their way of going about it that

they were able to read you and do the things that they wanted to do. Unfortunately, Orlin wasn't the biggest puncher, but he was so intelligent that he was able to capitalize on that with the mistakes that he created.

"That's something that not every fighter can do. Just because you're a great fighter, doesn't mean you're a good reader."

The reading process is what commentators in recent years have taken to calling "downloading," as popularized during the career of Vasiliy Lomachenko and carried over to fighters like Terence Crawford, who is known for slow starts in which he pokes at his victims and watches how they react. It's no sadistic game, though. Most fights – excuse the understatement – aren't Hagler-Hearns, and studying is a crucial part of cutting off the ring: identifying a fighter's patterns, picking out the strengths to neutralize and the vulnerabilities to exploit, learning the way they think. Among the very best, it can extend even further by reacting to the opponent's reaction and watching how they react to that.

"We call it counterpunching the counterpuncher," says Sanchez. "It's two or three moves ahead. But again, it takes an intelligent individual. Anyone who puts the gloves on can throw punches; you just gotta be able to throw them when it's to your advantage."

And none of this is to lose sight of the goal: Cutting off the ring is not just a battle of wits; it's a battle for control, and the object of that control is to land damaging punches. It's a tool for aggressive pressure fighters who aren't interested in hearing the opinions of ringside judges. It's the art of turning a large ring that seems like an open field of possibilities into a narrow hallway with a dead end. By design, there's a horror-movie feel. It's unnerving, having an attacker predict your intentions and remain in front of you no matter which way you go, keeping you off-balance and uncertain, all the while creeping closer for the attack. The psychological imbalance can easily disrupt the game plan of a fighter who isn't both physically and mentally prepared.

Adding to that situation is the imbalance of effort that good ring-cutters create. Mirroring the movements of an opponent is certainly part of the process, but that opponent will then be the one dictating the direction and the one who decides when to stop. To be able to throw punches effectively, a fighter has to be grounded, and whoever gets there first is the one who can plant their feet. That doesn't happen by following.

Cutting off the ring needs to be proactive rather than reactive. So instead of a mirror, a fighter who cuts off the ring well is more like a searchlight with legs – they make short moves sideways and forward, but basically they stay more planted and rotate their attention, scanning back and forth as their target has to cover more distance and expend more energy by moving side to side. The cutter slices the ring up into triangles, not squares, staying put at the vertex and projecting their intentions more subtly.

And that's where what Sanchez calls "presence" comes into play. The opponent has to know that the cutter already sees where they're going and know that if they continue in that direction, they'll be walking into danger. Thus they reverse direction, and while they're in motion, the cutter inches forward and ratchets up the pressure even further. Eventually they'll get close enough to strike.

"I watch how [the cutter's] feet are moving – how they're not crossing their feet, one," says Sanchez. "Two, how they're not really jumping; they're stepping and sliding their feet. They're stepping with their front with the direction they're going in and sliding with the other one. They're not getting off the canvas, and they're taking minimal steps.

"You can just shuffle. Within three moves, you've already moved a foot, and that's all you really need to be able to have a different angle."

The reward for this patient pressure is the final angle, the proximity and the containment to unleash the power punches of choice.

An impassive Julio Cesar Chavez zeroes in on Edwin Rosario, leaving him with nowhere to run.

He cites the lightweight title fight between Edwin Rosario and Julio Cesar Chavez in 1987, particularly the sixth round onward, as a virtuoso demonstration of how to take control of a fight – a perfect example of intelligence and skills in the hands of an aggressive fighter whose goal is to dominate. The fight is such a high-level, high-volume, fast-paced affair, and there's a lot more going on than just cutting off the ring, but what you see time and again is Chavez setting himself up at the beginning of each round in the center of the ring (the place where he can survey everything, move the least and dictate what happens next). Using adept, stable footwork, he then pressures Rosario backward into the ropes or into a corner, where he unloads with combinations. He controls where Rosario goes by varying his angles and position in relation to the ropes, and he knows how Rosario's reaction to one punch will set up the next. And there are so many punches. The pressure never lets up. The proud but overwhelmed Rosario, his left eye blinded by swelling, is finally saved when his corner surrenders in the final seconds of the 11th round.

Sanchez also mentions a prime Mike Tyson as an excellent practitioner of cutting off the ring "because of his speed and aggression." Canelo Alvarez is another, though the trainer admits that the fight against William Scull proved that even a world-class cutter can only do so much. He recalls being extremely impressed by the skills, especially the footwork, of Venezuelan compatriots Jorge Linares and Edwin Valero when they trained in the Los Angeles area. Lomachenko also, because of the otherworldly mobility that sometimes resembled teleportation more than boxing: "He wasn't an aggressive mover like I like to teach, but his feet were always in great, great position. He was cutting off the ring without cutting off the ring. He was putting himself in position to where you couldn't go anywhere. Probably the best, actually. Really better than anything I've ever trained."

When Sanchez first started working with Golovkin, he imagined creating another Chavez from the ground up, emphasizing the importance of footwork that would always result in the correct punching position and a solid foundation. For this, he turned to an unusual teaching aid.

"I showed him 'cutting horses' in the rodeo," said Sanchez. It was an idea that first came to him while on a ranch owned by Terry Norris' management team. He saw the way cowboys would use specially trained horses to separate calves from a herd and realized that the concept was exactly what fighters do to cut off the ring. With little to no input from the rider, the horses show the ability to read, the intelligence to anticipate, the footwork to be in position and a presence that clearly broadcasts who is in charge.

"When the horse quits cowing, the cow feels that," says horse trainer Kory Pounds in 6 Keys to Cow Smarts, by Ross Hecox. "They feel the pressure, or the lack of."

And the last thing you want in a boxing ring is a cow that doesn't respect you. It was certainly never a problem for Golovkin, who embraced Sanchez's teachings and perfected a brand of tenacity that made him synonymous with ring generalship. Much of that was just his presence, the panic-inducing aura he projected while cutting off the ring.

"Doesn't mean you're throwing punches, doesn't mean that you're going crazy. It just means that you're there," says Sanchez. "You're the one controlling the situation. You're the one who's demanding a reaction. You're the one who's providing an opportunity for yourself. You're not waiting for them to do something." RING

XIBZIIo

OLEKSANDR The GREAT

AFTER ONCE AGAIN CRUSHING THE NAYSAYERS AND SURPASSING EXPECTATIONS WITH HIS LATEST VICTORY, **OLEKSANDR USYK'S** EXCELLENCE CAN ONLY BE GAUGED ON A HISTORICAL LEVEL

By Gareth A Davies

It is time, then, to assess and mark some of the boundaries of the extraordinary career of undisputed heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk, after a punch-perfect performance of clever feints, balletic movement, expert timing, exquisite footwork and imperturbable mental strength in the face of power puncher Daniel Dubois at Wembley Stadium on July 19.

Hindsight has seen Usyk's foe heavily critiqued, Dubois' detractors describing the fighter as febrile and easily broken, and yet it was unquestionably Usyk's brilliance that nullified and squashed with alacrity the confidence that had grown in Dubois over three powerful victories since their first encounter in August 2023.

Usyk broke Dubois in meeting one, certainly, in spite of the "low blow" controversy that also helped set up promotion for the second fight. Yet come the second iteration, Usyk was even better, dismantling an opponent 11 years his junior with more aplomb this time, taking away the ignition fuse of "Dynamite"

Bradley Collyer - PA Images

so deftly, and then so brutally, with the efficiency of a quiet assassin. The great man and fighter rests now on a lofty perch in any permutation of discussions alongside the great boxers of yore. Certainly at heavyweight; potentially in any weight division.

Usyk gets better and harder to beat the second time around, it seems. That fighting IQ of his is so special. It also speaks to the warrior life he leads, drawing inspiration from historical Cossack traditions and the more immediate motivation of representing his people while Ukraine is at war with Russia. And, given his faith and beliefs, walking in the spirit with God on his side.

There are so many questions surrounding Usyk now. What more is there to prove? What are the attributes that it will take for any rival to defeat him? What are his weaknesses, if any? How long will the two-weight world champion wish to test himself? And are we watching the evolution of one of the greatest fighters ever to grace the ring?

Bigger, heavier, stronger … even younger is certainly not working. Not for now, at any rate. They have said his Achilles' heel is a vulnerability to body punches, and yet protecting his midriff has now become part of his art. They said Dubois was improved, more dangerous. Yet it was Usyk who was improved. He walked his opponent down; smothered the space; took the center of the ring, owned it; moved like a ninja from the corner ropes, trapped only once early in the fight.

Such improvements have been there, moreover, in every fight. Usyk's concern early in a fight reminds me of that feeling, in the last era, of watching Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s fast-twitch fibers on full physical alert as he sensed danger. That perhaps best describes a perception of Usyk on the night against Dubois at Wembley.

But let us go back a little, over Usyk's heavyweight career, after he had mastered the cruiserweight class. The fight with Derek Chisora is cited as the style with which to attack Usyk. Bustling, boisterous, indefatigable. Inarguably, then, "Del Boy" Chisora enjoyed successes. Yet it was five years ago, and Usyk was feeling his way as a heavyweight, the home fighter having a 38-pound weight advantage at Wembley Arena on the Eddie Hearn-promoted Matchroom Boxing event.

Chisora bullied his way onto the wrong side of a unanimous decision that night: 115-113 twice and 117-112 on the cards. I concurred with the last score – from British referee and judge Bob Williams.

Look further, and Usyk carefully dismantled Anthony Joshua in their first contest. He found angles from the start, bamboozling Joshua throughout, the Londoner's muscularity no match for the skills of the victor. The second fight was closer for the first two-thirds, and yet the master boxer emerged in the final three rounds, leaving Joshua petulantly snatching and throwing the belts out of the ring in Jeddah, frustrated at himself, yet tacitly admitting to the greatness of the boxer who had outdone him again. Through skills. Through holding his nerve until the end, knowing instinctively how to fillet his way through the championship rounds.

Then to the two fights with Tyson Fury in 2024, when Usyk became the undisputed champion and the clear leader and contender from this heavyweight era, which spans the decade since Fury took the mantle from Wladimir Klitschko.

The context of Usyk-Fury 1 and 2 should be recorded, moreover, given that this was the sport's first undisputed heavyweight champion since Lennox Lewis a quarter of a century earlier. It also came amid a seismic change in the sport underwritten by investment from Saudi Arabia, Riyadh Season and at the behest of influential move-maker Turki Alalshikh. The first contest between Usyk and Fury was a titanic battle, the second more a fistic, physical chess match of wit and will.

Usyk came out on top in the first see-sawing encounter by dint of his ninth-round attack on Fury, a 10-8 round, and

(Left) Richard Pelham; Libkos

(Right) Volunteer medics on Ukraine's frontline watch as Usyk battles Dubois.

through his skills again in the second meeting. Interestingly, many believed, including Lennox Lewis, that Fury should have rushed Usyk in the second fight, but perhaps it was just not there for the "Gypsy King" to exploit.

Usyk became better the second time around. It is a mark of his greatness.

So where does Usyk sit in the pantheon of legends? It befits Usyk, in my view, to be placed in the top 10 heavyweights of all time. How long will he wish to continue? Should he go on, he'll be 39 years old in January 2026. Perhaps only Father Time will stop him. In other words, perhaps only Usyk can invite defeat for Usyk.

Or perhaps his next move will be a defense against Joseph Parker – experienced, in form, and more effective than ever. The former titleholder from New Zealand deserves his chance. Or will the test be the formidable body-puncher Agit Kabayel?

The WBO's leading contender, Parker, is first in the queue, followed by Kabayel. Who of the two provides the sterner test? It is hard to say. As we went to press with this article, news surfaced that Riyadh Season would not sponsor the Usyk-Parker fight.

That may not matter. Usyk has become a known and respected sports star in the U.K., and by my estimation over half of the Wembley Stadium crowd of 90,000 was there cheering for the Ukrainian. Moreover, with over 200,000 Ukrainians residing in the U.K., it would not be beyond reason to stage the fight in London, with Parker also well-known to British sports fans there.

There is also the possibility of taking "road warrior" Usyk to New Zealand. Given the success of stadium fights in the U.K., we might suggest the visit Down Under less likely.

But does Usyk really need to fight Parker or Kabayel? Victories over either fighter, arguably, do not increase his legacy, though it would see him cleaning out a division that has had a very mobile top 10 in the past two years.

There is also the prospect of a third dance with Tyson Fury – still, for me, clearly the second best heavyweight of this era. Mention of that fight at Wembley Stadium on the night of Usyk-Dubois brought one of the loudest cheers of the night, rather than derision. The argument is whether Fury merits the opportunity and whether it would be for belts.

Usyk achieved double undisputed status at heavyweight inside five rounds.

In truth, it's likely the belts would be fragmented if that were to happen. It would be one last chance for Fury to right what he sees as a wrong. But could Fury reverse the outcome of the first two fights? Fury certainly wants a trilogy, being 2-0 down. It is still a commercial behemoth.

There is even the suggestion from the powerbrokers that it could be Moses Itauma, the 20-year-old seen as the coming force in the heavyweight division, next for Usyk. That possibility was confirmed by a post on X by none other than Alalshikh.

The fight with Itauma represents Usyk bridging the next generation. But is it too early for Itauma? And at the end of, say, 2027, after Itauma has had a few more fights (supposing, as we go to print, that Itauma has defeated Dillian Whyte on August 16 in Riyadh), could that be too late for Usyk?

Usyk could just walk away, too, leaving an incredible legacy of being undisputed in two weight divisions. The dismantling of Dubois would be his swan song. Wealth and legacy, health intact.

The aforementioned Hearn, who doesn't promote either man, reviewed the Usyk-Dubois fight in an interview with The Ring and summed up the performance with aplomb and accuracy.

Hearn rightly saw the brilliance of Usyk, rather than the failures of Dubois, as the identifier in the narrative of the fight.

"Incredible" is what Hearn told Ring Magazine. "I don't know why we are looking for all these excuses [for Dubois] when Usyk, who is pound-for-pound number one, battered Daniel Dubois.

"It doesn't matter if Daniel went to a yoga retreat rather than had a party at his house. He was getting stopped that night. Usyk is too good and the mindset is too strong for Daniel Dubois. It's too much for him. Daniel Dubois is a big, strong lump, and if you let him get confidence, he is a real problem. If you take that confidence early, he completely unfolds and breaks apart.

"The first two minutes of the fight, [Usyk] knew the power, he knew the danger ... you could see it in his eyes ... thinking 'this is not going to be a horrible night,' so bang ... he hit him, he hit him with the jab, and in the second round, started to walk him down, taking the center of the ring ... movement, head up and down, peppered him, just completely harassed him and made him spiral out of control. He completely destroyed Dubois mentally, started to beat him up, and then stopped him.

"People are saying this and that, that Dubois quit, but at the end of the day, [Usyk] broke him. He didn't want to continue; because he knew he was going to get a pasting. He didn't want to find a way back into the fight – he was done. Usyk has a way of doing that; he breaks your heart.

"The issue is, Dubois was ready to get up at six or seven. And when the ref got to 10, he just got up and strolled to his corner and he didn't even look like he was on unsteady legs. So that was the problem with it."

Hearn added: "In Usyk-Dubois 1, [Dubois] quit. But in the second fight, he got hit by a very big shot, and he got battered, but he definitely decided he did not want to carry on. I don't blame him. But there is a fighter's code. If you don't want to continue, [it means] you quit. That's what a fighter would say."

The talk that Dubois simply got up at the second count, and clearly demoralized, walked back nonchalantly to his corner, has drawn myriad views. People were also astonished by the pre-fight party (or "gathering," as trainer Don Charles called it) that happened at Dubois' home before the fight. It was labeled unprofessional and a disgrace. Whatever the fallout, only the Dubois family can answer that.

In the days after the fight, promoter Frank Warren sent me a brief video of George Foreman being knocked down by Muhammad Ali in The Rumble in the Jungle. Again, comparisons can be odious, but Foreman walks back to his corner, exhausted and demoralized, yet no one labeled him a quitter. Nor was he, of course.

In summary, Usyk has now laid waste to a generation of top-tier British undisputed heavyweight hopes in Fury, Joshua and Dubois, and in doing so, the unrelenting, uber-talented and utterly thrilling champion sits in a conversation alongside some of the greatest ever – Ali, Lewis, Foreman, Larry Holmes, Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, Joe Louis and many others. We will always debate how he would have fared against Ali (same birthday, same physical stature), Lewis and Louis, a prime Tyson and indeed Holyfield. Thinking about those matchups is a reality because Usyk has produced the goods. There are those who will decry this era, but let's emphasize that the balance of all the Ukrainian's attributes, physical and mental, put him in the conversation.

The manner in which he has nullified the power and dangers of his British foes and all others has created a tapestry of boxing brilliance. Time, as we know, waits for no aging athlete, and although Usyk and his extraordinary skill set continue to show few signs of decline, there will be younger fighters emerging and coming to hunt him down. Itauma is being fast-tracked through the levels. Perhaps that fight will be signed by the power, money and influence of the Saudis. Who knows? With the right purse, it might happen.

Brilliant and dangerous and fast as the young tyro Itauma is, I would still favor the Ukrainian to "old man" the Briton.

There is nothing to dislike about Usyk, and he carries world champion status with presence and an aura. Watching the fresh-faced 25-year-old winning Olympic gold in the heavyweight division at the London Olympic Games in 2012, few, if anyone, could have predicted just how great "The Cat" would go on to be.

At "38 years young," as Usyk proclaims himself to be, he also carries a level of responsibility, culturally and politically, that few other sportsmen either attain or even aspire to, given his constant affirmation for the support of his compatriots fighting against the Russian invasion of his country. He oozes class. He takes part in fundraising for the restoration and rebuilding of his ravaged country. And although instinctively it feels like the perfect time for him to walk away, there is the sense that he is not yet done. Let's treasure Oleksandr Usyk as long as the sport brings him back for more. We are witnessing someone very special. Very special indeed.

He might just be unbeatable. RING

Gareth A Davies is the boxing correspondent for The London Daily Telegraph and TalkSPORT.

Richard Pelham

DOWNLOAD COMPLETE

DUBBED "HI-TECH" AND "THE MATRIX" FOR HIS OTHERWORLDLY SKILLS, LAUDED FOR HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AND WILLINGNESS TO FACE CHALLENGES, **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** TOOK BOXING TO A NEW LEVEL IN MULTIPLE WAYS

By Michael Rosenthal, illustration by Butcher Billy

Richard Heathcote

Loma pierces the guard of 2012 Olympic champ Luke Campbell.

Luke Campbell had just defeated his opponent in a 2004 European junior tournament in Russia when he sat down to watch, for the first time, a 16-year-old Ukrainian who was creating a buzz in the amateur boxing world.

Campbell, who would cross paths with the fighter as a professional 15 years later, understood immediately that he was seeing something extraordinary.

"I was mesmerized by watching him," Campbell told The Ring Magazine recently. "The way he moved, his IQ. I knew immediately that he was another breed."

That's how most observers will remember Vasiliy Lomachenko – another breed – a boxing wizard who would become the most accomplished amateur boxer ever and climb to the top of pound-for-pound lists as a professional under the guidance of his father/trainer Anatoly Lomachenko, dazzling everyone along the way.

His pro career was brief in terms of number of fights – 21 – but he had more than enough minutes in the ring to establish himself as one of the best of his generation.

Bob Arum, Lomachenko's career-long promoter, learned that Lomachenko was different in more ways than one when he first met the prospective client and his team – including manager Egis Klimas – at The Beverly Hills Hotel in California.

One, Lomachenko declared that he wanted to fight for a major world title in his pro debut so he could become champion in the fewest fights in history. Arum explained that it wasn't possible because of rules in place, which require at least one outing. OK then, Lomachenko said, the second fight. Arum was impressed.

"He exuded confidence," Arum said. "So did his father. They showed very little ego, though. I came to realize what wonderful people they are."

Two, Arum asked the same question he'd asked hundreds of young, promising fighters over the years: "What sort of signing bonus are you expecting?" Lomachenko's response? "I don't want a signing bonus. I want you to promote me against the best fighters out there." Arum was stunned.

The Hall of Fame promoter, who signed Lomachenko in July 2013, learned in only a few minutes that his new young star wasn't driven by money like so many top athletes. He was motivated by the opportunity to chase greatness, his purses being a secondary concern. Arum was happy to oblige.

"Did it surprise me? It shocked me," Arum told The Ring when he was asked about his reaction to Lomachenko's perspective on the almighty dollar. "Everyone was throwing money at him, but he signed with us because he thought we could develop a relationship. He thought we could lead him to success in the pro ranks. That's exactly what happened.

"It was hard to believe in this day and age, when fighters are influenced solely by the amount of money they make."

Arum did his part. Lomachenko stopped fringe contender Jose Luis Ramirez in four rounds in his debut the following October. Then Arum, by weight of Lomachenko's two Olympic gold medals and other amateur accomplishments, was able to procure a shot at rough veteran Orlando Salido's WBO 126-pound title on the Julio Cesar Chavez Jr.-Brian Vera card in March 2014.

Lomachenko now had his chance to become a world titleholder in just his second pro fight, which would've broken the record of three fights by Saensak Muangsurin of Thailand. However, he would leave the ring disappointed. Salido, who had 55 pro fights under his belt and an abundance of guile, came in 2¼ pounds overweight (intentionally, some believe) and used roughhouse (dirty?) tactics to pull out a split decision victory.

The setback still stings those close to Lomachenko because, they believe, the playing field wasn't level. Salido ballooned to a reported 147 pounds by fight time, 11 more than Lomachenko. And those watching couldn't count the number of times Salido punched Lomachenko below the belt while referee Laurence Cole watched obliviously. Klimas believes it was 41.

In spite of all that, Klimas thought his man deserved the nod.

"Listen, Loma won the fight," he said. "We know what Salido did; he came in as dirty as he could. I one hundred percent believe Loma won that fight. Unfortunately, we had a bad referee, 41 low blows and no warnings."

Lomachenko put the loss behind him quickly to focus on the next challenge, a meeting in June of that year with the talented and more experienced Gary Russell Jr. for the title Salido lost by coming in overweight.

This time, Lomachenko gave a breathtaking boxing exhibition en route to a majority decision victory that most observers believed should've been unanimous, equaling Muangsurin's record in the process. Top Rank matchmaker Brad Goodman called Lomachenko's performance "a masterpiece." And many would agree.

"[Lomachenko] changed the sport completely, putting huge expectations on everyone else to do the same as he did." - Luke Campbell

One rival believes Lomachenko set the sport on a new course with his fast-track career path.

"He changed the whole game by fighting for a world title in two, three fights," said Campbell, who would lose a one-sided decision in a lightweight championship bout against Lomachenko in 2019. "He changed the sport completely, putting huge expectations on everyone else to do the same as he did."

And Lomachenko was just getting started. He would become the fastest ever to win a title in a second weight class, knocking out then-WBO 130-pound beltholder Rocky Martinez in five rounds in his seventh fight. Then, in 2018, he stopped Jorge Linares in 10 rounds to win the Ring and WBA 135-pound titles in his 12th fight, making him the quickest to win a major belt in a third division and catapulting him to the top of most pound-of-pound lists.

He was the best in the world after only 12 fights.

"He did an amazing thing," Goodman said. "How many guys can say they did what he did? [Floyd] Mayweather didn't win titles so early in his career. Neither did Oscar [De La Hoya]."

Said Klimas: "He became No. 1 pound-for-pound in no time. Other guys, it took them 10, 12, 15 years. Loma did it [in] like three, five years."

Lomachenko would fight only nine more times after meeting Linares, going 7-2 in those bouts. The first loss came against Teofimo Lopez in 2020, a fight in which Lomachenko entered with a right-shoulder injury and further damaged it in the bout. He had surgery the following Monday. And then undisputed champion and massive lightweight Devin Haney outpointed him in a close but unanimous – arguably controversial – decision in 2023.

Lomachenko would bounce back a year later to stop George Kambosos in May of last year, winning the IBF 135-pound title. This past June, the 37-year-old announced his retirement.

He finished with a record of 18-3, with 12 knockouts, which might not look particularly impressive at first glance. And he didn't face a few of the biggest names at or near his weight, including Gervonta Davis.

Skeptics might point out the above and question Lomachenko's credentials. Well, Campbell echoed the perspective of others who followed "Hi-Tech's" career. Consider these numbers:

- He finished with a reported record of 396-1 in the unpaid ranks against some of the best amateurs on the planet. His only loss came against Albert Selimov back in 2007, a setback he avenged twice.
- 17 of Lomachenko's 21 fights were for major world titles. He was 14-3, with 10 knockouts, in those bouts.
- Seven of his title bouts came at 135 pounds, meaning more than a third of his biggest fights came against naturally bigger men. "He could've easily gone back down to 126,"

Goodman said.

- He was 10-3, with seven knockouts, against reigning, past or future world titleholders.
- His opponents had a combined record of 561-45-17 at the time, a .900 winning percentage. Salido accounted for 12 of those losses.
- He defeated four unbeaten opponents: Russell, Nicholas Walters, fellow amateur star Guillermo Rigondeaux and Jamaine Ortiz.

Of course, he could've padded his record like most fighters do by knocking off pushovers in four-, six- and eight-rounders as part of the typical maturation process. He could be, say, 40-3 with many more knockouts. He didn't need to because he received his education in the amateur ranks, which is why he pushed to face the best possible opposition right out of the gate.

Trainer Shane McGuigan, who was in Campbell's corner when he fought Lomachenko, was sold on him a long time ago.

"He had 21 fights. He fought for a world title in the second. He went straight to that level," McGuigan said. "That's insane. He didn't need development. He had a very good career, an amazing career."

Trainer Joe Gallagher, who watched his fighter Anthony Crolla get stopped by Lomachenko in four rounds, agrees with McGuigan.

"Most fighters need 20 fights to learn the ropes," he said. "Lomachenko had one fight and then went straight into a title fight. He had a huge apprenticeship as an amateur, coming through that computer scoring system. Nobody ever said, 'He needs to adapt his style. He needs to change.' He was there right from the start.

"What a quality boxer he was. I don't think he gets the recognition he deserves."

Lomachenko obviously commanded attention from the outset of his professional career, the boldness of his career path, his perfectly honed skill set and, of course, his accomplishments. The experts thought enough of him to recognize him as the best fighter in the world for several years.

"He had 21 fights. He fought for a world title in the second. He went straight to that level. That's insane. He didn't need development."
- Shane McGuigan

However, he could've been more popular. He didn't have one-punch knockout power, which all fans find attractive. He stopped his opponents with hard, accurate volume punching. Indeed, his style appealed more to those who appreciate the finer points of boxing.

As Campbell implied earlier, Lomachenko, who started boxing as a toddler, could be mesmerizing. His footwork and spacing were things of beauty, as if he were part athlete and part ballet dancer. He always seemed to be in exactly the right place at the right time, which allowed him to pick apart one baffled opponent after another.

He might take one or two rounds to gather crucial data but, once he figured you out, he forced you to bend to his will.

"His judgment of distance was incredible," Campbell said. "His footwork, his flurries, his combinations, his IQ, everything. I hit him with a shot in the first round that made his knees dip. I couldn't land that shot again over the next 12 rounds.

"I'm quite smart as well. I trick people into giving me what I want. He wouldn't give me anything. Nothing."

Or, as McGuigan put it, "He was just two steps ahead [of Campbell] the whole fight. He was a master at getting people to fight the way he wanted."

Gallagher compared Lomachenko to some of the best of his generation. "Guys like Canelo [Alvarez] and Andre [Ward] are just really, really good boxers. The same with Lomachenko. I remember walking away from his fight with Anthony [Crolla] thinking, 'Wow, how can anyone be that good?'"

Still, not everyone bought into Lomachenko 100% because of the subtleness of his attack. And he had something else working against him: He didn't connect with many fans because his English is limited and he wasn't flamboyant.

Lomachenko is simply a gifted, hard-working guy who found his calling as a child and made the most of it.

"One of the first things I said to him when I met him was that he has a birth defect: He was born in a different country," Klimas said. "Imagine if he were Mexican. Imagine how big he would've been. But this is where he was born. We have to respect that."

As it was, he earned universal respect.

Arum and the rest of those interviewed for this article were asked where they believe Lomachenko ranks among the top fighters of the last half century. They all agreed that he was among the best of his era, given his success at both the amateur and professional levels.

And while none placed him alone at the top of their lists, they weren't afraid to group him with some storied champions.

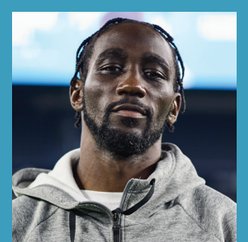
Arum was asked whether he could say Lomachenko's name in the same sentence with Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao, who built legendary careers. He didn't hesitate to answer in the affirmative.

"He's in the same sentence," Arum said. "Each of them were different. Every boxer has something that makes them unique. None are the same. All have different personalities, different aspirations and different careers.

"What made Lomachenko unique? He was interested in his craft, almost to the exclusion of being interested in monetary rewards. Obviously he wanted to get purses, but that was secondary.

"He was an artist. He took great pride in the art of boxing. You could see that every time he stepped into the ring." RING

"I think Lomachenko is an all-time great, talented fighter. The things that he was capable of doing were tremendous. He was great and I take my hat off to him. He had a helluva career and done a lot for the sport in a short period of time and I wish him nothing but the best.



"When he went up in weight, he was always the smallest guy. He was fighting these massive guys just to try to appease the fans; fighting certain fighters they wanted him to fight when he could have just stayed at 130."
- Terence Crawford

Lomachenko : Richard Heathcote

NOMASCHENKO

During an 11-year professional career, Lomachenko turned in some exquisite performances across multiple divisions. The Ring takes a look back at five of the Ukrainian master's most outstanding displays (in alphabetical order).

Guillermo Rigondeaux

December 9, 2017
Madison Square Garden Theater
Title: WBO junior lightweight

Despite Lomachenko being a couple of divisions north of Rigondeaux, this was considered a dream match between two of the best amateur fighters in history. It turned into a nightmare for Rigo. Accustomed to controlling fighters with ease, the previously unbeaten Cuban couldn't get a thing done against Lomachenko. He was outclassed from start to finish and retired on his stool claiming a hand injury.

Result: TKO 6

Jorge Linares

May 12, 2018 – Madison Square Garden
Titles: The Ring and WBA lightweight

Unbeaten in 13 straight fights over six years, the classy Linares fought brilliantly, decking Lomachenko for the first time in his career in Round 6. Adapting immediately, the quick-moving Ukrainian soon solved the puzzle and halted the defending champ with a sharp left-hand body shot in Round 10.

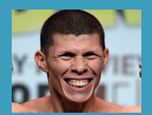
Result: TKO 10

Gary Russell Jr.

June 21, 2014 – StubHub Center, Carson, California
Title: WBO featherweight

The 24-0 Russell hadn't lost a fight for seven years, amateur or pro, when he went against Lomachenko for a vacant world title. It was elite-level combat between the pair, and Russell had his moments. However, Lomachenko was undoubtedly superior and the majority decision victory in his favor flattered Russell.

Result: MD 12



Roman Martinez

June 11, 2016 – Madison Square Garden Theater
Title: WBO junior lightweight

Despite debuting in a new weight class against a formidable world titleholder, Lomachenko operated at a level Roman Martinez could only dream of reaching. The challenger won every round before ending the fight with a spectacular left uppercut-right hook combination that laid the Puerto Rican fighter out like a rug.

Result: KO 5

Nicholas Walters

November 26, 2016 – Cosmopolitan, Las Vegas
Title: WBO junior lightweight

Undefeated in 27 fights, Walters was expected by many to provide stern resistance when he challenged for Lomachenko's world title. He didn't have a prayer! Using angles rarely seen in the ring, the Ukrainian wizard whipped home accurate combinations for seven rounds before forcing Walters to remain on his stool.

Result: TKO 7

CROSSOVER HIT

ALREADY A SUPERSTAR IN JAPAN FROM HIS SUCCESS IN KICKBOXING AND MMA, **TENSHIN NASUKAWA** HAS NOW EMBRACED BOXING AND INTENDS TO PROVE HIMSELF AGAINST THE BEST IN THE SPORT

By Daisuke Sugiura

In a 2018 exhibition bout, Tenshin Nasukawa got taken out inside a single round after three quick knockdowns at the hands of Floyd Mayweather Jr. Demolished in front of a passionate Japanese audience, the acclaimed kickboxing and MMA champion had never competed against a professional boxer before. He could have been forgiven for never putting on boxing gloves again.

Fast-forward six and a half years and Nasukawa is now a pro boxer himself, unbeaten in seven fights and closing in on a world title bout. The quick-fisted southpaw has been fast-tracked successfully and has made improvements with every fight. He is rated No. 6 by The Ring at bantamweight and is currently the No. 1 challenger with the WBA and the WBC.

It's been a remarkable transformation for Nasukawa, who has the personality and confidence to match his talent and the ready-made stardom to drive ticket sales. If the young contender can continue on this path, then there are huge fights on the horizon, and, as you will soon discover, he won't have to travel very far to make them happen.

Illustration by Chris Wormell

Naoki Fukuda

The Ring spoke to Nasukawa and gained some fascinating insight into one of Japan's most exciting young boxers.

The Ring: How do you reflect on your professional boxing career so far?
Tenshin Nasukawa: It's been about two years since I turned pro, and I really feel like I've been able to grow with every fight. I'd say my style isn't quite set in stone yet – I'm constantly trying to show that I can do anything in the ring. Most fighters have a set style, like "this is how this guy fights," but in my case, I think I show something different every time. I feel like I've been able to highlight a new strength with each fight.

The Ring: In your last two fights, you defeated world-ranked opponents Jason Moloney and Victor Santillan. Through those bouts, where do you feel you've improved the most?
TN: I believe boxing is closely tied to how you live your everyday life, and I think the biggest growth has been as a person. As for my boxing itself, I feel like I've become even more versatile. I used to only be able to fight from long range, but now I've developed the ability to fight at close range, too. I've always said I want to understand every aspect of the sport, and I feel like I'm really making that happen.

The Ring: So rather than saying your skills or speed have improved, you feel you've grown more as a person?
TN: Yes, that's right. I think I've been able to approach each fight with a mindset of wanting to understand boxing more deeply. I feel like that's where the growth is happening. I'm starting to grasp the sport little by little, and going forward, I hope to gradually add more of my own essence into that understanding.

Nasukawa beat the experienced Victor Santillan last time out.

TN: Ideally, it's being able to win without even letting my opponent touch me. I don't think knockouts are everything, but I want to entertain people through my fights and make them fall in love with boxing – that's the ideal for me.

The Ring: There's often debate around your knockout power. Do you personally want to score more KOs?
TN: Yeah, I do want that. But that doesn't mean I'm focused on building power. It's not just raw power that knocks people out – it's really about timing and speed. That's what I've been working on: how to refine and execute those elements.

The Ring: So it's not about doing heavy weight training or anything like that.

TN: Exactly. It's not about that. For me, sharpening my speed and timing is much more important. I believe that if I can master those, the power will come naturally as a result.

The Ring: Is your desire to score more KOs connected to your wish to put on exciting fights?
TN: Definitely. There's this atmosphere or expectation in boxing that a fighter *has* to get knockouts to impress. And while I do want to show that side, I also feel strongly that knockouts aren't everything in boxing. Look at history – there have been all kinds of great fighters. Going the full 12 rounds is also part of what makes boxing special. I want to help people who don't yet understand boxing or aren't familiar with it to see and appreciate all those different aspects of the sport.

The Ring: Even before winning a world title, you've had a lot of attention and pressure. That kind of hype is rare. At this point, does the level of expectation or fame ever feel like a burden? Or do you enjoy it?
TN: I've dealt with this kind of pressure since my kickboxing days, so honestly, I almost never feel it. No, I don't feel pressure. Even if I lose, the world's not going to stop spinning – animals are still going to be out there living their lives. (laughs) So I just think it's really not that big of a deal.

The Ring: It's also a kind of honor, but despite your popularity, you're already probably the most criticized or disliked boxer in Japan.
TN: Yeah, yeah, that's true. (laughs)

The Ring: Doesn't it ever make you angry when people say things about you?
TN: Not at all. I actually feel grateful. I think anyone who says *anything* about me is someone who has some kind of passion. And that passion matters. Having people on both sides – supporters and critics – is what creates real energy. There are even people who've never watched boxing who have something to say about me. If I can be the reason those people come to know boxing, then that's great. So I want them to keep enjoying things even as critics. But I do wonder: How long can they keep being "anti"? Like, if I become a world champion, are they still going to be haters? I'd like to see how strong their commitment is. If they're going to flip and change sides, now's their chance. (laughs)

"I believe boxing is closely tied to how you live your everyday life, and I think the biggest growth has been as a person."

The Ring: If you were to describe the biggest difference between kickboxing, MMA and boxing, what would you say?
TN: The audiences are different, I'd say. Kickboxing and MMA tend to attract younger fans. Boxing, although younger people are starting to watch it recently, generally appeals more to an older crowd. They don't watch with intense excitement, but more like they're appreciating an art form – almost like being at an art museum. That's the image I have.

The Ring: So the atmosphere at kickboxing or MMA events is quite different?
TN: Yeah, those events have more of a "go, go, keep pushing!" vibe. With boxing, the number of rounds is higher and it's hard for fans to stay hyped all the way through a 12-round fight. I think younger people nowadays aren't good at watching long things, so in that sense, boxing doesn't really match with the times.

The Ring: Do you often think "Boxing could be better if it just changed this one thing"?
TN: Honestly, I could go on and on. But on the other hand, the fact that boxing has stuck to its traditions is exactly why it still holds a sense of prestige today. In boxing, fighters are judged by their true strength. If you're not truly strong, you can't step into the ring. In other combat sports, even if you're not that strong, as long as you attract enough attention, you can get fights. Sometimes it's like, "Wait, this guy's already getting a title shot?" But boxing doesn't really allow for that. Only truly strong fighters get into the most important fights, and I think that standard has been preserved well.

The Ring: That's definitely one of boxing's strengths. But is there something boxing still lacks?
TN: I feel like boxers end up being seen as just "fighters." If fans could see why a boxer fights, what kind of person they are, then I think it would be easier for them to get emotionally invested. Without that, it's hard to generate real passion. It's not just about watching someone strong. When people get a glimpse into their humanity, into what they fight for or how they live, it makes a big difference. I think sharing those sides of ourselves is important.

The Ring: Especially in Japanese boxing, there's a sense that those kinds of stories don't get communicated well.
TN: I think in the past, TV used to help get those stories across. But now that boxing isn't on TV much anymore, we fighters have to tell those stories ourselves. If you don't speak up, you can't survive. That's the world we live in now. For me, continuing to share through social media or YouTube comes from not wanting people to see me as "just a fighter." I want to be someone people support even outside the ring, someone they root for regardless of whether I'm boxing or not.

The Ring: Do you have any favorite fighters?
TN: Since becoming a boxer, I do watch some big matches when they come up. I think Terence Crawford is really strong. He's got the skills, speed and power – the whole package. My trainer, Mr. Takahiro Aoh, and my promoter, Mr. Akihiko Honda, also told me that he's someone worth studying. But in general, I try not to watch too much boxing. I don't want to be influenced or stuck in certain patterns that might change my own style. I think staying true to my own style is important.

The Ring: I've heard you don't even watch footage of your opponents before fights.
TN: That's true. I've been that way since my kickboxing days. If you study your opponent too much, you might not know how to react if they do something unexpected. That's not good. So I always try to be ready for anything, no matter what comes at me.

The Ring: In the U.S., you're still remembered for your 2018 exhibition match with Floyd Mayweather. How do you look back on that now?
TN: It's not like a bitter memory or anything. Looking back now, I'm just amazed it even happened. To be honest, I didn't know much about boxing at the time. (laughs) I was living in the *Dragon Ball* universe – if there's a strong guy out there, I get excited and want to fight him. That's how I've always been. After switching to boxing for real, I realized, "Wow, I fought someone that legendary." I'm glad I got to do it.

The Ring: It was a wild matchup – a lower-weight fighter against someone from a middleweight class. But you still see it as a positive experience?
TN: Yeah, I'm glad I got to fight him. I mean, don't you want to test yourself against the best guy in the world? If that kind of offer comes, no fighter would say no. I've never run from a challenge. I always want to fight strong opponents, and that mindset definitely came out back then too.

In his sixth pro fight, Nasukawa beat former titleholder Jason Moloney.

Naoki Fukuda

The Ring: Now that you've learned more about boxing, are you still interested in those "adventure-style" fights?
TN: Of course. I still want to do them. But I haven't even become a world champion in boxing yet. [...] So for now, I need to focus on becoming champion and building my resume. After that, I want to take part in fights that can spark big movements again. I'm an entertainer at heart.

The Ring: Are you still living in a manga-style world today?
TN: Yes, that's still how I live my life. I fight strong enemies, eat meals with my friends, and then say, "All right, on to the next challenge!" (laughs) That's the kind of world I live in.

The Ring: Besides *Dragon Ball*, what other comics do you like?
TN: *Naruto*, *One Piece*, and I also like *Akira*. I enjoy all kinds of anime, really.

The Ring: You're a major draw in Japan, but have you ever thought about fighting in the U.S. someday?
TN: Yeah, I've thought it might be fun one day. I even imagine what kind of production or entrance I'd do. It's not like fighting in the U.S. is my ultimate dream or anything, but if there was an offer and someone genuinely wanted me to fight there, I'd definitely consider it. That being said, people say Las Vegas is the center of the boxing world. But I think Japan is part of the world too – that's how I see it.

The Ring: A world title fight is starting to come into your view. Do you feel like you *have* to win it? How do you personally view the idea of a boxing world title?
TN: It's not like I'm doing this because I'm desperate to have a championship belt. Just having the belt doesn't necessarily mean you're strong or amazing, right? I think value is something you define for yourself. That said, I do think I need to win it to give more weight and credibility to what I'm doing.

The Ring: So it's something you need to show as part of your pursuit of true strength?
TN: Yeah, without that, people won't really be convinced. I feel like winning a title is kind of the starting point for everything else. You have to take care of that first before you can move on to bigger things.

The Ring: When is your next fight? Will it be a world title bout?
TN: Probably sometime in the fall — around the time the leaves are changing color. That's when I think it'll happen. It's planned to be a world title fight. Last time they called it a "world title eliminator," so I think that's where things are headed.

The Ring: Do you feel any sort of rivalry with WBO bantamweight world champion Yoshiki Takei?
TN: Not really, to be honest. We've both competed in kickboxing and now boxing, and he's a champion in boxing now. From a storyline perspective, I think it would be interesting if we fought – something the fans would enjoy. It'd be one of the more exciting matchups within Japan. If it's meant to happen, I think it will.

The Ring: You're three wins and one draw against him from your amateur kickboxing days, right?
TN: Yeah, that's right. He's considered one of the top fighters of our generation, so of course I want to fight him.

The Ring: Right now in the bantamweight division, there's a strong group of Japanese fighters, like Junto Nakatani, Seiya Tsutsumi, Ryosuke Nishida, Takuma Inoue and Daigo Higa. Is there anyone in particular you'd like to fight?
TN: Honestly, I want to fight all of them. Some people look at a division stacked with domestic talent and think, "Man, this is going to be a rough path." But for me, I feel like I've been training in boxing so I can beat *every single one of them*. I want to fight all the big names and strong opponents. That said, it's been two years and I'm still not a champion. I've been learning what boxing is all about, and when the time is right, I'll be ready. I think starting next year is when things will really get exciting.

The Ring: Where do you think you are right now in terms of a percentage of your potential?
TN: Hmm. Good question. Maybe around 60%? I've still got a long way to go. Could even be closer to 50%. Somewhere between 50 to 60%, I'd say.

The Ring: Right now, Japanese boxing is being led by Naoya Inoue. As someone who's watched fighters from all over the world, how do you see Inoue?
TN: I just think he's incredibly strong. He can do everything, and he fights aggressively. Honestly, he's the kind of boxer you can't really find any faults with.
The Ring: Would you like to fight him someday, even with how strong he is?
TN: Yeah, I think if I become strong enough, the opportunity will come. That's why it all depends on how much I can elevate my own ability. Right now, saying I want to fight him wouldn't be realistic – it would just create weird expectations around me, and that's not good. I'm actually pretty grounded. But if the time comes, I'll be ready. And I do believe that time *will* come. That's part of what makes boxing so exciting for me.

The Ring: So you're enjoying boxing?
TN: I'm loving it. I'm honestly grateful to boxing. I never knew something could be this fun.

The Ring: More than what you've done before?
TN: Kickboxing has its world, MMA has its world – each one has its own kind of enjoyment. It just feels like I've jumped into something new and found a different kind of joy. From the outside, boxing might not look flashy. It can seem kind of plain. But the more you learn, the more you realize how deep it is. I genuinely enjoy training. I can't get enough of it.

The Ring: How's your chemistry with trainer Takahiro Aoh, a former world champion himself?
TN: I feel like even if boxing weren't involved, we'd still be close. I just like him as a person. He's honest – no sugarcoating – and I really respect that. When something's not right, he tells me straight up. That kind of person is the easiest to trust. You know, as you get stronger or gain more status, a lot of people start surrounding themselves with yes-men. But Aoh-san isn't like that. He treats me as an equal.

The Ring: What's your ultimate goal, both as a boxer and as a person?
TN: I've always said this, but I want to energize Japan. Of course fighting is important, but living everyday life properly is even more important. Everyone has tough times and struggles, but I want to send the message that we keep going and live through it.

The Ring: And what do *you* think you have to do to uplift Japan?
TN: I have to show that I'm not just talk. Actions speak louder than words. I believe it's important to live out what you say. For that, I need to keep getting stronger, keep winning and keep putting on exciting fights.

A lot of adults say stuff like, "Life was more fun when I was a kid." But come on – life can be fun as an adult, too. If we keep saying childhood was better, kids might start thinking there's nothing to look forward to. I want to show people that life stays fun even when you grow up. RING

INSEPARABLE

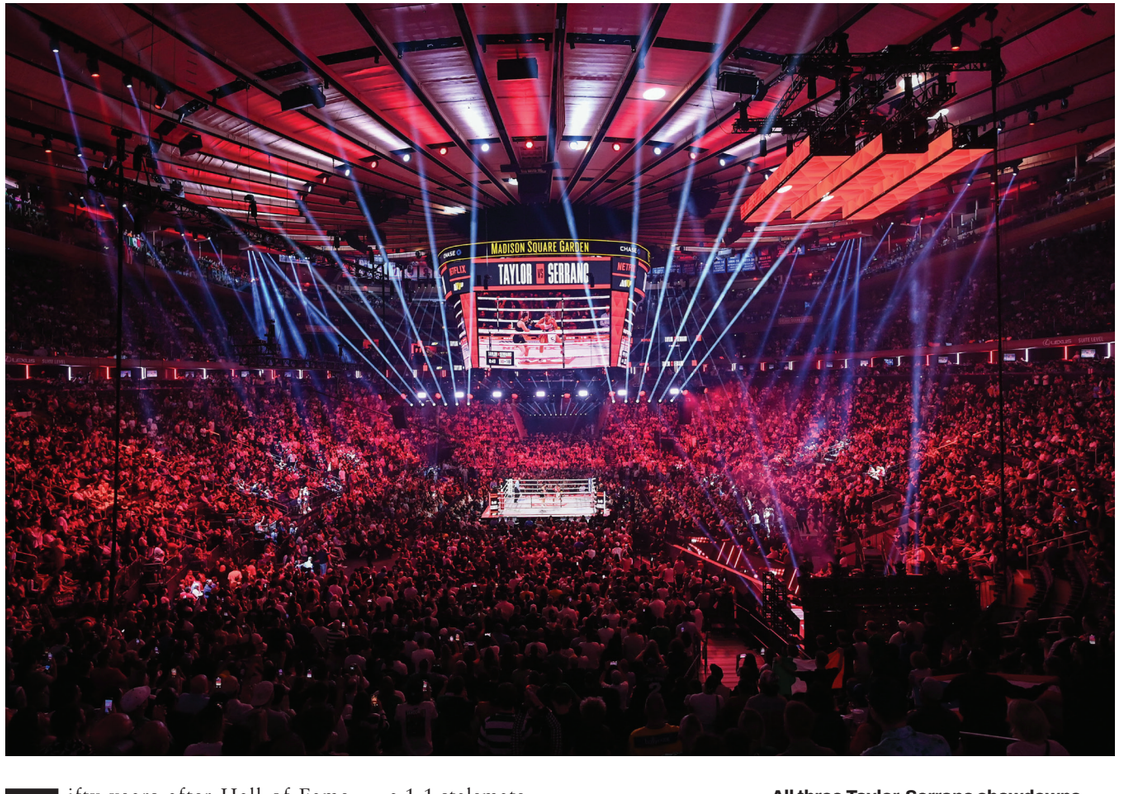
WITH THE THIRD ACT OF THE **KATIE TAYLOR-AMANDA SERRANO** EPIC NOW CONCLUDED, THE TRAILBLAZING RIVALRY WILL TAKE ITS PLACE AMONG THE GREATEST TRILOGIES IN BOXING HISTORY

By Thomas Gerbasi

"I learned an irrevocable truth that day. What I saw was not a battle for the heavyweight championship of the world. Each man knew a private truth in his heart. They were fighting for the championship of each other. Each had always made the other a little better than he was. They could have fought on a melting ice floe or in a phone booth. They were fighting for their own metaphorical Holy Grail, because their previous two meetings had meant the same to both of them: unfinished business."

– Jerry Izenberg, Newark Star-Ledger, September 30, 2015

Inset: Al Bello



Fifty years after Hall of Fame boxing scribe Jerry Izenberg witnessed what many still believe is the greatest fight of all time, the third clash between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier in 1975, two other boxers laced up the gloves for the third time to close out a trilogy that was also fought for the championship of each other.

Yes, there were many belts on the line, but it really didn't matter at this point for Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano. When they entered the ring in a packed Madison Square Garden on July 11, it was a fight to settle once and for all who the better woman is.

On paper, Taylor had already won the battles and the war, having defeated Serrano via split decision in 2022 and unanimous decision in 2024. But these were no mere fights and no mere results. Many believed it could have been Serrano up 2-0 heading into their third meeting or, at the very least, a 1-1 stalemate.

As for the first two fights, they were game-changers. If die-hard followers of the sport – the male side – find it sacrilegious to put Taylor and Serrano in the same conversation as Riddick Bowe and Evander Holyfield, Arturo Gatti and Micky Ward, Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales, and the rest of boxing's greatest trilogies, consider that none of those three-fight series changed the landscape of the sport quite like Taylor-Serrano did for women's boxing.

Ireland's Taylor signed with Eddie Hearn and Matchroom Boxing when she came out of her second Olympic Games in 2016, and her star continued to rise as she was fast-tracked to a world title by her seventh pro fight.

Puerto Rico's Serrano had quite a different road to the biggest fight – and payday – of her life. With little amateur experience, Serrano learned her craft on the job as a pro, fighting anyone, anywhere at any weight. By the dawn of 2017, the Brooklyn resident was a four-division titleholder making $17,500 for a Showtime-televised win over Yazmin Rivas.

All three Taylor-Serrano showdowns filled the house.

That was women's boxing in those years. There were a couple haves and a lot more have-nots. The difference here is that the haves wanted the have-nots to join them, and they were willing to take the risks necessary to ensure that all the women got what they deserved.

Taylor was such a visionary, telling Hearn that one day women would be fighting big fights in big venues, making big paydays.

"What was quite unique about that situation was she was kind of selling the idea to me," Hearn told me before the first Taylor-Serrano bout. "Normally, I'll sit down with a fighter and put out a blueprint and give them the big sell. But she told me what she felt was possible and she believed that this day would come. Now, if you would have told me back then that one day Katie Taylor would be headlining a sold-out Madison Square Garden, I would have said that's adventurous, even by my standards."

Stephen Marcarthy

Yet Taylor and Serrano pulled it off on April 30, 2020. Yes, Serrano was a seven-division titleholder at this point and a popular fighter in the United States and Puerto Rico, but it took Taylor, the undisputed lightweight champion, to make the fight happen. Much like Canelo Alvarez, Taylor reached the point in her career where she was able to call her shots. Whenever she did, the women standing across the ring from her experienced life-changing paydays and worldwide exposure. Now it was Serrano's turn, and for the pair's trouble, they would each receive a $1 million check.

All that was left was the fight, and while expectations were that it was going to be a good one, I don't think anyone expected it to be a great one. And "great" may not cover it. Why? Think of what is considered a great fight: It usually involves heated exchanges, high-level technique and drama. In women's boxing, the historic knock is that you might get one of those aspects, maybe two, but never all three.

Yet on the biggest stage in the sport, Taylor and Serrano delivered. Again, a lot of that had to do with Taylor. A fast and effective boxer when she wants to be, Taylor also has a warrior's heart, so if you hit her, she wants to hit you back immediately, game plan be damned. Early on, Serrano hit Taylor and boxing went out the window. In the fifth round, Serrano's power started to take its toll, and a stoppage seemed imminent. Not that Taylor agrees.

"I don't think I was as hurt as some people think in that round," said Taylor after the fight. "She is obviously a good puncher, like her record suggests, but I was never hurt in there and I have a very good chin. Of course, it wasn't a good round for me, but I just had to regroup, reset and get back to the game plan, and I think I did that in the next round."

Taylor did rebound, and the war continued, back and forth, with the two trading momentum from minute to minute. It was enough to make trainer Ross Enamait lose his hair if he didn't already have a shaved head.

Taylor was such a visionary, telling Hearn that one day women would be fighting big fights in big venues, making big paydays.

"I think Ross is used to that by now," Taylor laughed in a post-fight interview with The Ring. "I'm never afraid to have a tear-up. I love to stand and have a fight, even if it's not the smartest thing to do sometimes, but you just get caught up in the moment and want to go toe-to-toe with your opponent. I knew coming into this fight that there would be times when I would have to dig deep and go into the trenches, but I enjoy that. You can't be a great fighter unless you have the heart of a champion, and over the years I think I've shown I have that."

Taylor planted her feet and traded with Serrano in the closing moments of the fight, and "The Real Deal" nearly sent her to a knee in the process. Some saw that as enough to prove Serrano's superiority on this night, but only judge Benoit Roussel agreed, scoring the fight 96-94 for the Brooklynite. Judges Glenn Feldman and Guido Cavalleri overruled him by scores of 97-93 and 96-93, respectively, and Taylor had the win.Yet as close – and controversial – as that verdict was, both fighters were all class after the final bell, showing an entirely new audience that female boxers weren't just talented and gritty, but good role models for young women everywhere.

So they had to do it again, right? Right. Unfortunately, the boxing business reared its ugly head again, and Taylor and Serrano wouldn't throw hands with each other for another two-and-a-half years.

In the meantime, Taylor beat Karen Carabajal and went 1-1 with Chantelle Cameron at 140 pounds, losing for the first time as a pro. Serrano kept winning, going 5-0 while becoming undisputed featherweight champion and campaigning unsuccessfully for the rematch with Taylor to be fought over 12 three-minute rounds.

Finally, the fight was set for AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on July 20, 2024, but when the headliner between Mike Tyson and Jake Paul was postponed, Taylor-Serrano 2 was pushed to November 15, 2024. Aired on Netflix, the fight was going to be the most viewed in women's boxing history, and the paydays were even higher, allegedly topping $6 million for each combatant.

All good news before the opening bell, but when it rang, could it possibly match or top the first fight? Yeah, it did. Arguably even more visceral the second time around, Serrano jumped on Taylor in the first round, rocked her and nearly dropped the champion, now defending her 140-pound titles. Again, Taylor rebounded and started brawling. This time, the infighting was marred by several head clashes, one of which opened a nasty cut over Serrano's right eye, while another prompted Taylor to get docked a point on the scorecards. But neither backed down. Taylor waded into the fray recklessly while Serrano ignored the blood streaming down her face to give as good as she got.

When 10 rounds were completed, it

Al Bello

Fight three was less intense, but both women scored with flush punches.

was another case of wondering who was going to get the nod. Most expected Serrano to even things up, but again, it was Taylor, this time via three scores of 95-94.

It was a crushing blow for Serrano, but a reported 50 million Netflix households saw it happen.

Fast-forward to July 11 and the third meeting. Fighting again in Madison Square Garden, the friendly rivals weren't as friendly this time, presumably tired of seeing each other in the ring.

But this one was bigger than the first two and more important for the sport. Serrano's promoter, Most Valuable Promotions, signed a host of the top fighters in women's boxing in the lead-up to the fight, and they would be featured on the all-female undercard. The women on the card, from top to bottom, would be paid fair purses while getting worldwide exposure on Netflix.

For Taylor and Serrano, it was mission accomplished. For the sport. As for the championship of each other, perhaps it's unfair to call the third bout anticlimactic, but it certainly didn't produce the nonstop action of the first two.

Instead, Taylor boxed brilliantly, sticking and moving and avoiding the punches from Serrano that would have forced her into a brawl in the previous 20 rounds they fought. Serrano was game throughout, and it was still a competitive fight, but the two-minute rounds flew by and seemingly ended just when she was starting to catch a rhythm. At the end of 10 rounds, the scores of 97-93 twice were more based in reality than judge Mark Lyson's 95-95, and just like that, Katie Taylor was 3-0 over Amanda Serrano.

"I thought I showed a very smart performance, a very clever performance," said Taylor at the post-fight press conference. "This performance, I knew what I was capable of against Amanda. The two fights previously ended up as complete wars and I came out of the ring battered and bruised, and I'm thinking, 'Why am I just standing there?' I was outboxing her and I'm just happy I was able to produce that tonight and execute the game plan that Ross has been telling me to do all along."

Luckily, while recency bias will judge the third fight harshly in comparison to the first two, history will remember that the second Ali-Frazier and Gatti-Ward fights weren't as good as the first and third ones, while Taylor-Serrano 3 wasn't the epic that the first two were. And honestly, how can you criticize any series that forces two fighters to dig deep and find out who they are within the confines of a four-sided ring? Serrano proved that she was an all-time great who could deliver against a bigger, more decorated opponent. Taylor, who will also be a first-ballot Hall of Famer, proved that she could change her strategy and fight a disciplined fight against someone who took her into some dark places in their first two fights.

"I'm just so grateful for Amanda Serrano ... And we created history together three times. My name will always be embedded with hers forever."
- Katie Taylor

Taylor and Serrano together produced the first true superfight in the history of women's boxing – then did it twice more. The ladies have delivered good fights over the years, compelling fights, fights that got the attention of fans, even if just for a moment, but there's been nothing like this. My mother, who is 85 years old, watched the second Taylor-Serrano fight and made sure she had her Netflix raring to go for the third one.

No other women's fight comes close. In fact, the only one in the history of the game that might have – Christy Martin vs. Lucia Rijker – never happened. I spoke to Martin before Taylor-Serrano 3 and asked her if a fight with Rijker would have been a game-changer for the sport. She didn't think so.

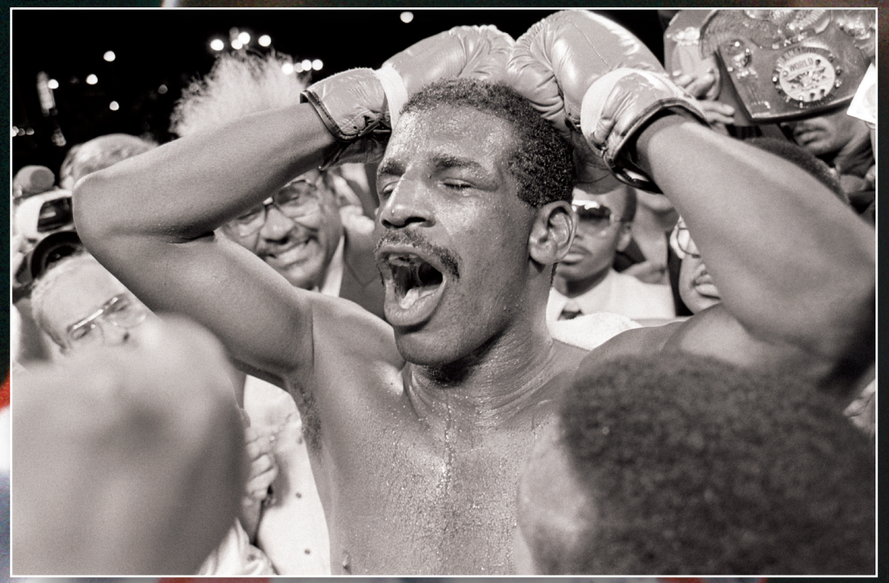
"Women's boxing was on the rise at that time," said Martin. "Don King had given me personally a great platform fighting under Mike Tyson on those huge shows, and it would've just helped elevate women's boxing to a little higher level than it was at that time. But would it have done for women's boxing what Taylor-Serrano did? Probably not."

Taylor-Serrano 1 was the perfect storm. It only got bigger from there. And as strong as women's boxing is at the moment, we probably won't see a series like this again.

And that's fine. A lot of fans want to see a fourth fight between the two, but even before the third, the 36-year-old Serrano had seen enough of Taylor, saying that even if she won that third fight, she was OK with walking off behind in the final tally, two wins to one. As for the 39-year-old Taylor, many believed that her final ring appearance was going to be on July 11, and that still may be the case for a fighter with nothing left to prove and no bigger fights than the three she had with the Puerto Rican kid from Brooklyn who started this whole journey just for fun as a teenager.

"I'm just so grateful for Amanda Serrano," said Taylor. "What an amazing champion. And we created history together three times. My name will always be embedded with hers forever. I'm very, very happy about that. What we've been able to create over these last few years has been unbelievable. It's amazing to have a rival like that in the sport." RING

TRIUMPH AND TRAVESTY



THE FIGHT ITSELF WAS UNSATISFYING AND MARRED BY A REGRETTABLE OUTBURST, BUT **LARRY HOLMES VS. MICHAEL SPINKS** RESULTED IN A REMARKABLE WAKEUP CALL FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVED HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONS WERE SAFE FROM THE "LITTLE GUYS"

By Don Stradley

The first round turned out to be like all the rest. Larry Holmes, the long-reigning heavyweight champion, would stalk Michael Spinks but never quite nail him. That's how it went for 15 rounds. Holmes would say later that the fight hadn't been hard, just long.

It must have felt that way. The contest was an inglorious end to what had been a seven-and-a-half-year run as the world's best heavyweight. Holmes had held the title when sports pages still revered it, and most would admit he is among the best heavyweights ever. For Holmes to lose the championship this way, on points to a quirky light heavyweight in what The Baltimore Sun called "a dreadful fight with little action," was like a stunt driver who had survived countless car crashes only to be killed in a crosswalk by a guy on a unicycle. It made no sense.

As unexpected as the fight's result may have been, it was overshadowed by Holmes' behavior in the fight's

Inset: Betmann; Bob Riha Jr

immediate aftermath. No doubt unsatisfied with his poor performance, he directed his bile at one of the most beloved fighters the business had ever known: the late Rocky Marciano, whose undefeated record Holmes was attempting to match and whose presence had hovered over the bout for weeks. The diatribe, delivered in a Las Vegas pressroom, was a case of emotions running high. He felt terrible about it later, but once the words were out, he was stamped as a loudmouth who had made millions of dollars but remained classless. Michael Katz of the New York Daily News interviewed him afterward, portraying Holmes as ashamed and embarrassed. "I hope he is forgiven," Katz wrote. At the time, such an idea seemed far-fetched. Holmes, who was never particularly popular, had become a full-blown pariah.

The fight itself felt like a last-minute lark. During the first part of 1985, Holmes and Spinks were talking retirement. Though younger than Holmes, Spinks had done all he could as the light heavyweight champion. He'd made a verbal challenge to Marvelous Marvin Hagler, the middleweight champion who was red-hot after his victory over Thomas Hearns, but nothing came of it.

It was Spinks' trainer, Eddie Futch, who first teased the idea that Spinks could become the first light heavyweight champion to win the heavyweight title. Spinks played it down, mostly because Futch had also trained Holmes for years. "If the fight is made, Eddie's in for a tough night," Spinks said. "He's gonna work my corner for one round, then Holmes' corner, then back again. He'll be running from one side of the ring to the other."

Moreover, the world wasn't clamoring for the fight. Light heavyweight champions had a history of trying and failing to win the heavyweight title. In 1985, most of the working sportswriters could recall the well-known parade of Georges Carpentier, Billy Conn, Archie Moore and Bob Foster, all of whom were knocked out in their attempts to win the heavyweight crown from Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Marciano and Joe Frazier, respectively. Most reckoned Spinks' chances were no better than his light heavyweight forefathers. Still, Futch pressed on. He insisted Spinks could not find a decent payday at 175, or in the obscure cruiserweight class.

Holmes dismissed the idea when it was first floated. Spinks, he said, "was not a quality opponent for me." When he wasn't threatening to retire, Holmes had a grandiose exit strategy in mind, including a European tour of exhibitions. When reminded that he was just shy of matching Marciano's record of 49-0, Holmes talked about fighting Greg Page or Pinklon Thomas, or maybe a rematch with his old rival, Gerry Cooney. But increasingly, Holmes said he was done boxing. "Why should I go through more training?" he said. "I don't need it, and I don't want it."

He said he wouldn't fight Spinks for less than $4 million.

Though he talked about retiring to focus on his real estate ventures in Easton, Pennsylvania, no one believed Holmes would leave boxing without trying to surpass Marciano's undefeated streak. No heavyweight had come close to it, and though the record wasn't as heralded as, say, the home run record in baseball, it was a valid talking point along press row and among boxing fans. Going 50-0 would help raise Holmes' profile and guarantee him, if not celebrity, a measure of reverence.

"Sometimes people light candles and pray for your defeat. Sometimes you can't overcome that."
- Larry Holmes

Holmes' pre-fight joviality was in sharp contrast to his notorious post-fight flare-up.

Holmes claimed to not care about such things, but when Marciano's name was mentioned around him, his bitterness appeared, practically oozing from his pores. He would claim Marciano's record was padded with exhibitions (not true) and that his own record was already better than Rocky's. Meanwhile, Holmes groused that the Ford Motor Company had cut his endorsement deal and replaced him with New Jersey Generals quarterback Doug Flutie, a switch Holmes blamed on racism. It was more likely that Ford thought Holmes had lost some of his luster, which was accurate.

Holmes had been inconsistent during his 1984-1985 campaign. He was 35 years old with a lot of hard miles on him. Along with an unhealthy right hand, doctors had diagnosed him with vertebrae problems.

He was still the Ring and lineal champion and was the man to beat, but he'd given up his World Boxing Council title and now wore the recently established International Boxing Federation belt, which meant little at the time. Four months before fighting Spinks, he'd struggled to win a 15-round decision over Carl Williams. He'd reached 48-0, but with his subpar ring performances and his obsession with money, Holmes had become a bit like bloated royalty, an old king on his throne ready to be knocked off. Not that anyone believed Spinks was the man to do it.

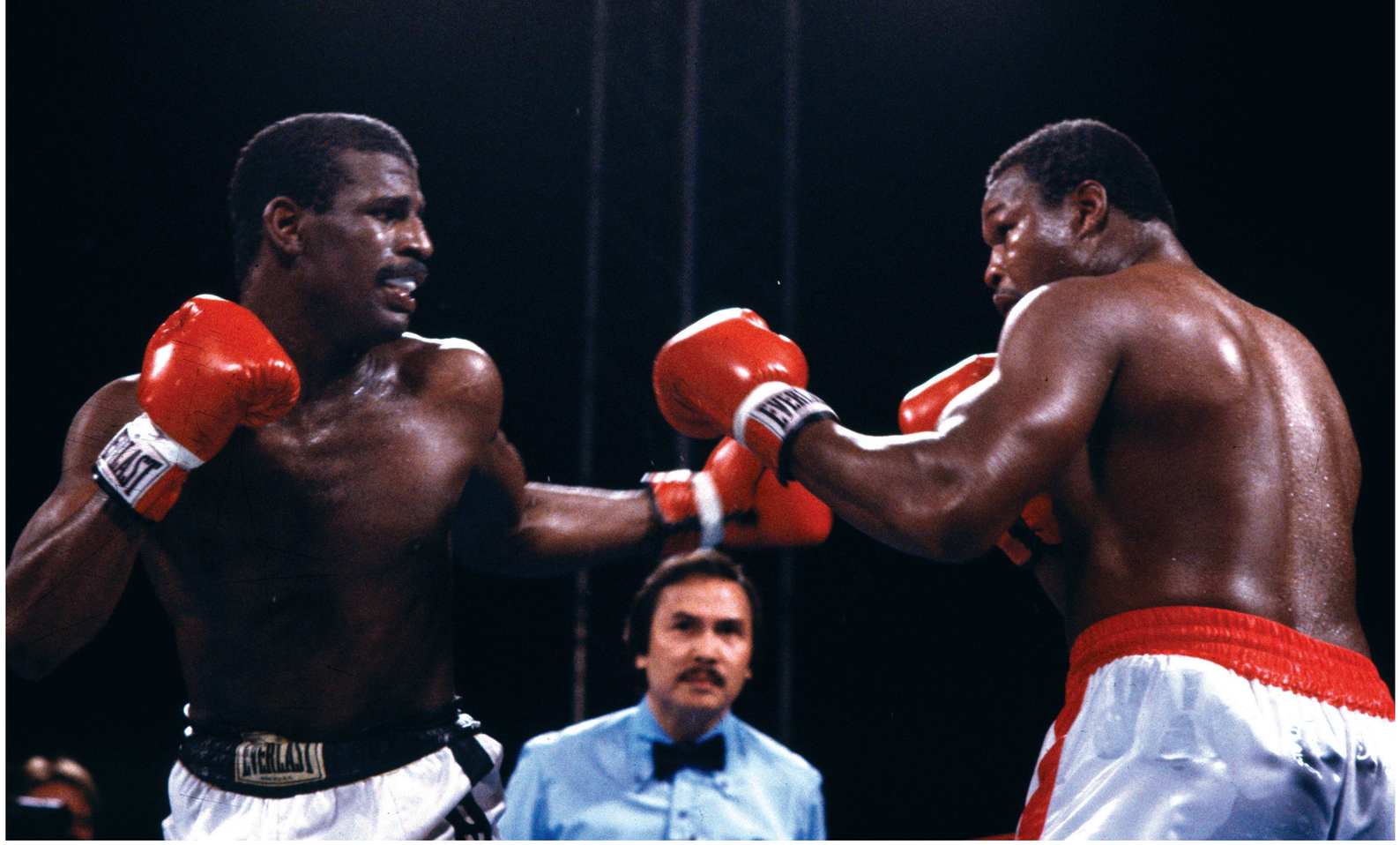
The fight was proposed for May on NBC, but Spinks turned it down, saying he needed more time to prepare. Instead, he fought Diamond Jim MacDonald and stopped him in eight. From there, the Holmes and Spinks camps haggled over money, but by June the fight was signed. Then, while trying to block out the old-fashioned thinking that a good big man always beats a good small man, Spinks spent the summer training for an opponent he usually referred to as "the big guy."

Spinks' magic talisman came in the form of Mackie Shilstone, a physiologist and nutritionist who had been in Spinks' camp for three years. Spinks walked around at 205 and usually had to shed 30 pounds for every fight. Now, instead of helping Spinks drop pounds, Shilstone designed a program that would build him up into something resembling a heavyweight. Shilstone eschewed traditional methods in favor of modern techniques using weights, speed drills and meticulous calorie-counting.

Boxing's old guard thought Shilstone was an eccentric spouting drivel about carbohydrates. In their eyes, Spinks would always be a knock-kneed light heavyweight. Holmes would handle him like a Doberman chewing up a terrier. Or so the reasoning went.

There was a symmetry to the event. Holmes could pull up even with Marciano's record by beating Spinks, and Marciano had reached his own 49th victory by beating Archie Moore, the light heavyweight champion of the time. Additionally, the fight was made for September 21, 1985, the 30th anniversary of Marciano-Moore. Promoters Butch Lewis and Don King were pulling out all the stops to make it seem Marciano was part of this event, if only in spirit.

Not surprisingly, Holmes received hate mail for daring to tie the record, while older columnists declared him overrated and lacking Marciano's panache. Holmes grew edgy, declaring no one had thought about Marciano for years until this fight. "I have resurrected Rocky Marciano," he said, displaying a tiny hairline crack in his psyche that by fight time would grow into a chasm.



Despite being the smaller man, Spinks proved to be stylistic hell for the aging Holmes.

Bob Riha Jr

Though first set for Atlantic City, the fight was moved to a temporary outdoor arena at the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas. Despite the hype about Marciano's record and Spinks trying to become the first light heavyweight champion to win the heavyweight title, the fight was not a pay-per-view event on the Hagler-Hearns level. It would be a standard weekend bout televised live on HBO, an interesting curiosity and nothing more, with most expecting Spinks to wind up like Carpentier, Conn, Moore and Foster before him. Holmes certainly played it up that way, being respectful of Spinks in person but telling reporters in private that he was going to win early and easily.

Futch decided to sit the fight out and work for neither man, though he told the Associated Press that the 6-to-1 betting odds against Spinks were way off. "You have to give the smaller man a shot," said Futch.

Futch explained that people underestimated Spinks because of his style. Spinks could appear ungainly, as if his legs weren't in sync with his torso, but his odd movements were akin to a jazz artist ad-libbing before settling down to the melody. Spinks looked weird at times, but he was simply stalling to figure out his next move. "Sometimes," Futch said, "he doesn't know what to do."

Against Holmes, Spinks looked like he was skating figure eights along the canvas, throwing odd combinations not taught in gyms from angles not taught in trigonometry classes. At one point, he threw a left hook followed by four lead rights. These spasms of offense baffled Holmes. How could anyone counter such improvisations? Indeed, it was a long night.

Holmes' face between rounds told the story. He would sit with his eyes closed while his cornermen, in a kind of panic, offered silly advice (Do it for your kids!). Holmes looked put-upon, not in command. He would chase Spinks all night, like a man trying to trap a mouse in a cup. He'd land an occasional body shot or a glancing blow off Spinks' forehead, but the challenger, who weighed a neat 199¾ pounds to Holmes' 221½, would respond with a flurry. He'd then resume his erratic movements, seeming to bow to Holmes, offering his head momentarily and then hopping away. "I mesmerized him," Spinks said.

The scorecards were 143-142 (twice) and 145-142, all for Spinks. Though the crowd appeared to be on Spinks' side simply for surviving against the bigger man, the fight itself was unimpressive and difficult to score. Many felt Holmes won, including the Associated Press, Sports Illustrated and The New York Times, but the tepid nature of the contest precluded any heated debates. "Even if Spinks had not done enough to deserve to take the title," wrote the Times, "Holmes had not done enough to deserve to keep it."

The HBO commentators praised Spinks for making history and wondered if Shilstone's methods were the wave of the future. Mostly they focused on Holmes. How would he handle his first defeat as a professional?

Looking tired and slightly scuffed, Holmes told HBO's Larry Merchant that Spinks was "very awkward" and would be a good champion. He didn't think Spinks was any stronger than a light heavyweight, but he had a difficult style. "I couldn't get my right hand going," Holmes said, mystified.

As for not matching Marciano's record, Holmes started to unravel just a bit.

"Sometimes people light candles and pray for your defeat," Holmes said. "Sometimes you can't overcome that. And me worrying about that … I guess that takes a little bit out of you. I mean, you train so hard for 18 years and still don't win the recognition …" Then Holmes pivoted, trying to be philosophical. In the game of life, he said, "we all must die."

By the time Holmes took the podium for the post-fight press conference, his tongue was loosened. He wanted to say something to the Marciano family, some of whom were in Las Vegas for the fight.

"If you want to get technical about the whole thing," Holmes said, "Rocky couldn't carry my jockstrap."

Once that was said, Holmes spun out of control. "If I hurt your feelings, it's too fucking bad," he said. When Marciano's brother Peter tried to respond from the audience, Holmes erupted.

"Shut up! This is my show," the former champion bellowed. "If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't even be allowed in here."

After calling Peter a "freeloader" who lived off his brother's memory, he declared there would never be another white champion and told the Marciano clan to go back to their racist state and "stuff Boston up your ass." Inexplicably, Holmes tried to backtrack and praised Marciano, but it was too late. In just a few minutes, he'd done more damage with his mouth than he'd done in 15 rounds with his gloves.

Whether it was frustration at having lost the title or the inevitable flare-up from a man who always felt the boxing establishment was against him, Holmes' outburst provided his championship reign with a nasty curtain call. "No one's been hurt more by my angry remarks than I have," Holmes wrote in his 1997 autobiography. "No matter what I say now, the fact is I was wrong. I shouldn't have said it." Yet Holmes still talks about a mysterious "they" who wanted him to lose to Spinks. In a 2021 interview on YouTube's VladTV, he mumbles something about how Spinks' promoter "had the judges" and that Marciano was 5-foot-2 and wouldn't have touched him. Decades have passed, but Holmes still shadowboxes both men.

In the days after the bout, few talked about Spinks being the first light heavyweight champion to win the heavyweight title, or that he and his brother, Leon, were the first brothers to win the heavyweight championship. The stench left behind by Holmes made Spinks' feat secondary. "DIGNITY TAKES ONE ON THE CHIN," read one headline. "The demon of his bitter ego has always been Larry Holmes' toughest opponent," wrote The New York Times' Dave Anderson. "When he finally lost, he didn't know how to."

A few days later, Holmes issued a full apology to the Marciano family.

Forty years have passed, and the Holmes-Spinks bout is fading into antiquity. Selected by The Ring as Upset of the Year for 1985, the fight is generally remembered for Spinks' use of Shilstone's modern training techniques. Yet the truth could be that Holmes was an old, battle-weary champion ripe to be plucked, and almost any top heavyweight might've beaten him that night.

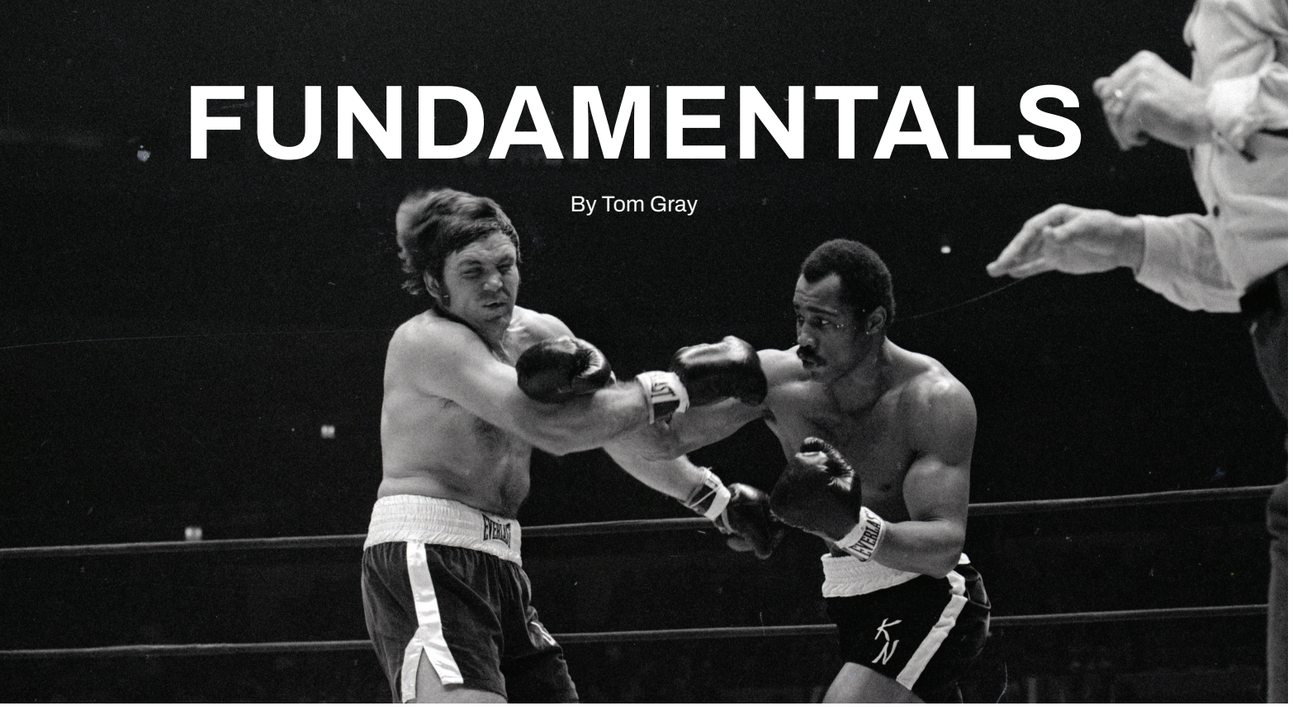
Holmes went on fighting. There'd be another close (and controversial) loss to Spinks and a few more title challenges, but his golden days were over. Spinks, too, was closer to the end than anyone realized.

"He was lucky he was fighting me," Holmes told Katz in 1985. "If he had been fighting one of them younger guys who are still hungry, he'd be in trouble."

Holmes was correct. When Spinks eventually fought a particularly notorious young, hungry heavyweight, he was blown out in 91 seconds. But that's how it goes in boxing. One night you're making history. The next night, you are history. And your nutritionist can't do anything about it.

FUNDAMENTALS

By Tom Gray



FORGOTTEN CLASSIC:

Ken Norton TKO 5 Jerry Quarry

» March 24, 1975, Madison Square Garden

On the same night that Muhammad Ali successfully defended his heavyweight championship against Chuck Wepner in Richfield, Ohio, a far-superior glamour division shootout took place more than 400 miles east in New York.

The scheduled 12-round title eliminator between Ken Norton and Jerry Quarry was a crossroads bout that would open a closed-circuit Don King broadcast before switching over to the Ali-Wepner card as part of a special heavyweight doubleheader.

Two years earlier, Norton, a former Marine, had broken Ali's jaw while outpointing him, but the Adonis-like Californian was on a rebuild after losing the rematch and succumbing to a pulverizing second-round stoppage by then-champion George Foreman. Norton now harbored hopes of securing a rubber match with "The Greatest" for the championship.

Quarry had also posted mixed results in recent bouts. Since his second loss to Ali in 1972, he'd impressively outclassed an unbeaten Ron Lyle over 12 rounds the following year before catching Earnie Shavers cold for a stunning first-round TKO victory. However, "The Bellflower Bomber" took an awesome pounding at the hands of ex-champ Smokin' Joe Frazier in their second encounter and was considered by many to be damaged goods.

Norton's jab carried the day in the opener as Quarry was made to miss with whizzing left hooks. In Round 2, the crowd at MSG was at fever pitch as both fighters duked it out ferociously at midrange. Quarry targeted the body with left hooks, which set up a short right hand, while Norton responded with head-splitting right uppercuts.

The third stanza was pure hell. Quarry suffered a gash over his right eye and was nailed by a series of power-packed combinations at center ring. Sensing urgency, Quarry spun his man and put together a desperate two-fisted assault that lasted for over a minute. Norton was caught to the head and body while trapped against the ropes, but he also raked Quarry with accurate counterpunches.

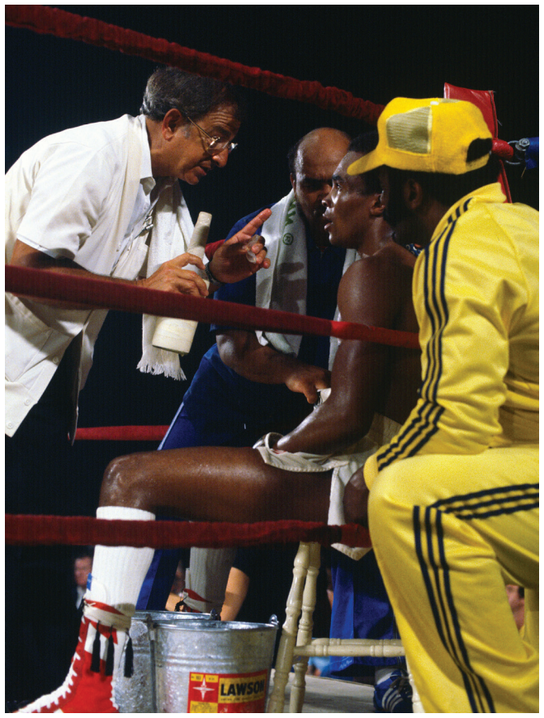
With his opponent wounded and winded, Norton went to work in earnest. In the fourth, a pulverizing body attack opened Quarry for more jolting hooks and uppercuts that snapped his head back alarmingly. The bout could easily have been stopped at this point, but Quarry, a warrior to his core, produced enough offense to stay in the hunt.

Tired, bleeding, badly hurt and with his vision impaired, Quarry should have been pulled out of the fight by veteran trainer Gil Clancy at the end of that round. However, the battered fighter dutifully marched out for the fifth and absorbed a merciless pounding. A fusillade of head shots nailed Quarry until referee Johnny LoBianco stopped the fight at 2:29.

LOST FIGHT

Sugar Ray Leonard UD 10 Randy Shields

» October 6, 1978, Civic Center, Baltimore



Luckily for fight fans, most of Sugar Ray Leonard's illustrious 40-bout career is accessible either on YouTube or via fight film collectors. However, one showdown that no one seems capable of locating is the legendary former champ's tussle with old amateur rival Randy Shields.

On May 12, 1973, Shields scored a three-round decision over Leonard at an AAU tournament in Boston. For context, Leonard lost only five times in his entire 150-bout amateur career. While far from being a household name, Shields is remembered by veteran insiders as a highly touted amateur who developed into a well-rounded pro.

In the late 1970s, the North Hollywood native often appeared in The Ring's welterweight ratings and also earned himself two WBA title shots. In 1979, Shields would be deemed very unlucky to lose a 15-round decision to Pipino Cuevas, and he lasted into the 12th round against Cuevas' conqueror Thomas Hearns the following year.

His bout against Leonard was also competitive. Reports suggest that while the future all-time great buzzed Shields on more than one occasion, he saved his best punch for referee Tom Kelly, who had to be replaced by official judge Harry Cecchini after absorbing a Sugar Ray left hook in Round 9.

This bout was sandwiched between Leonard's TKO 10 victory over Floyd Mayweather Sr. and a decision win over Bernardo Prada, both of which were broadcast on network TV. Why Leonard-Shields wasn't preserved remains a mystery, but Sugar Ray himself told me that the bout was definitely televised.

MUST READ

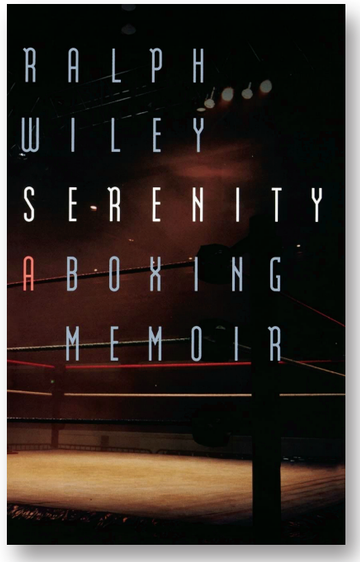
Serenity: A Boxing Memoir

» By Ralph Wiley (University of Nebraska Books, 1989)

Part memoir, part 1980s boxing chronicle, you'll struggle to put down this brilliantly written book by late Sports Illustrated journalist Ralph Wiley.

Juxtaposed alongside conversations with his uncle, who boxed professionally, are insightful interviews with the likes of Roberto Duran, Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns, Sugar Ray Leonard, Bobby Chacon, Larry Holmes and many more greats who were at the peak of their powers.

Upon explaining his ringside vantage point at the undisputed welterweight title fight between Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns on September 16, 1981, Wiley sets the scene. "The bell rang and – oh, what feints! What speed! Between the first and second rounds, I noticed the studious eye of Ali. He had the same look on his face a law professor might wear while sitting in the back of a mock court as his proteges argued cases brilliantly. Ali was satisfied."



Wiley provides a fascinating glimpse into his own life and his relationship with boxing. RING

An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure

By Dr. Margaret Goodman

Every ringside physician will tell you that serious boxing injuries originate in the gym. It makes sense, doesn't it? Throughout their career, a fighter spends countless hours sparring and a comparative fraction of time in actual fights.

So how do we proactively protect fighters from concussion, chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and brain bleeds? What should every trainer and every fighter know – irrespective of them accepting the risks?

Pennsylvania-based Stephen "Breadman" Edwards, one of boxing's most respected trainers, has always been a strong advocate for fighter safety. "When I begin working with a fighter, I start with the basics before sparring begins. You check the gloves. I don't allow Velcro gloves and make certain they're taped right, or it can contribute to injury." Brain health is of primary concern. Although the studies are limited, he believes a well-fitted mouthguard made by a dentist and re-evaluated yearly can make a difference by absorbing some forces contributing to a knockout.

Edwards, who trained former unified junior middleweight titleholder Julian Williams, closely watches a fighter's reaction time during sparring: "If my fighter is sluggish, I have no trouble giving him time off for a recovery day (to avoid injury). That means massage, a hyperbaric chamber (a pressurized enclosure that forces more oxygen to be absorbed by the body), yoga, no running, overhydrate, correct food intake and sleep."

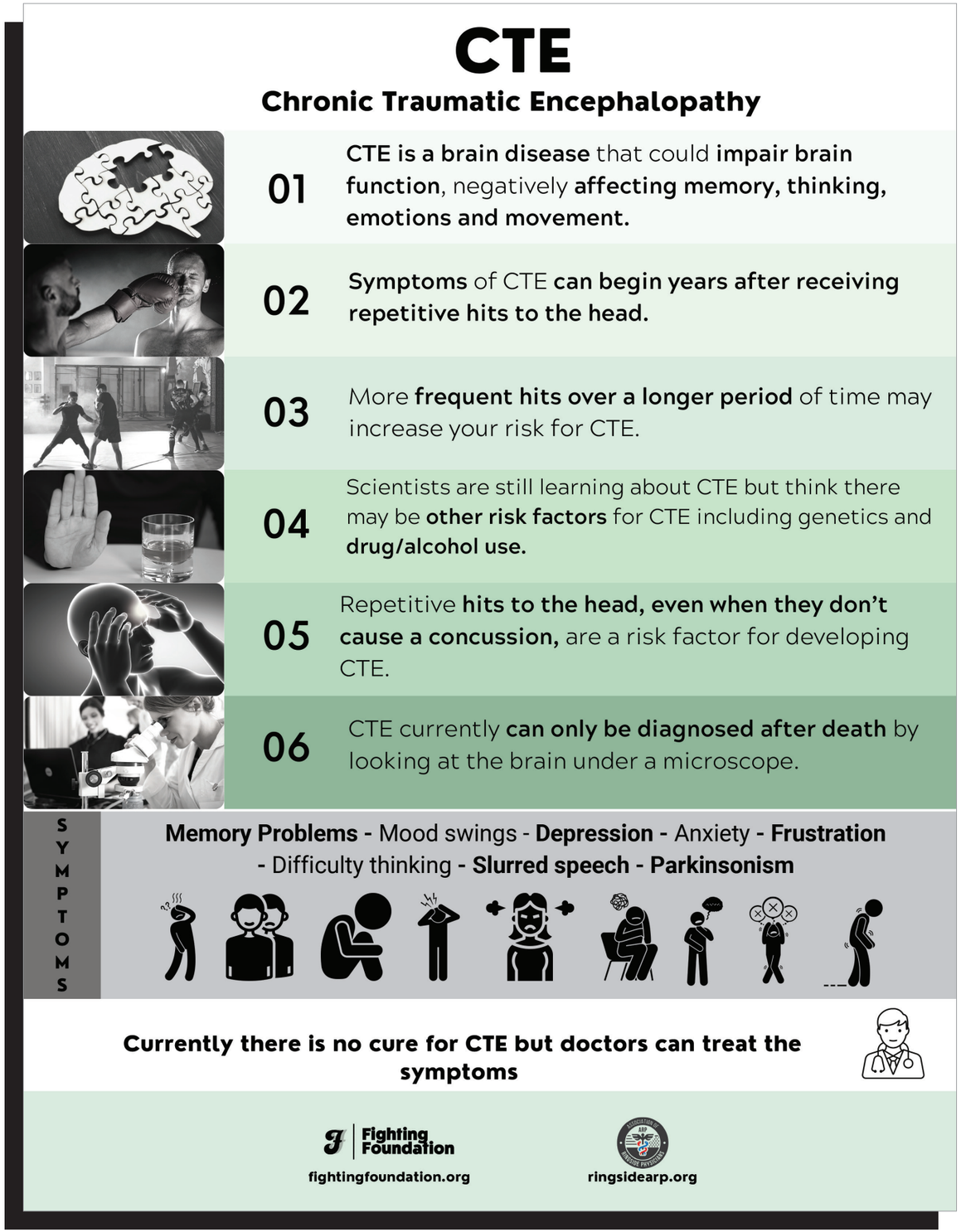
He agrees "gym wars" serve no purpose, only contribute to brain trauma, and believes in "competitive sparring" where his guys don't take too much punishment. He also watches out for sparring partners' safety. "I've stopped sparring partners when I have told a coach that's enough. They might say, 'Oh, my guy is OK,' but I stop it and still pay the guy."

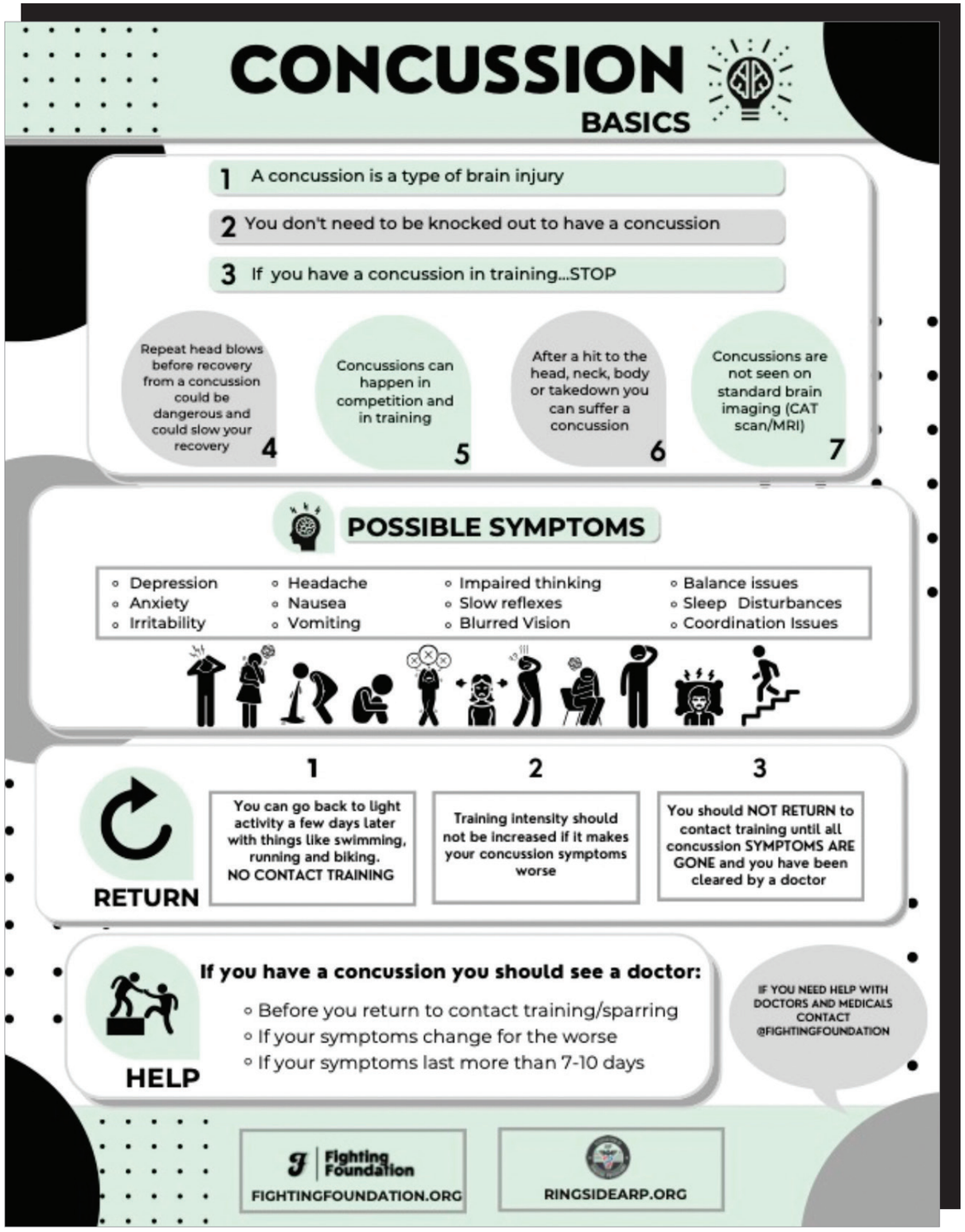
Erik Magraken – a combat sports regulatory attorney as well as a licensed Muay Thai, kickboxing and MMA judge – has always been a strong advocate for better brain health in fighters: "The trainer is ground zero, and they must take brain health seriously. Combat sports have the lowest level of brain health education, and most gyms are without concussion protocols in place."

In 2022, Magraken teamed up with former fighters Rose Gracie and Carla Duran (daughter of well-known cutman Jacob "Stitch" Duran) to create two posters – one listing the symptoms of concussion, how one can occur and how to seek help; and a second poster detailing CTE, its symptoms, and how fighters can lessen risks. He reached out to every commission, asking them to post them on their websites. Many did, including Nevada and Illinois, but they also received a blessing from the Association of Ringside Physicians, which lists the information as a resource. Magraken even physically drove the posters to all the gyms in his surrounding area of British Columbia, advocating for them to be posted.

Not everyone agreed to post the potentially life-saving information. He didn't know the reason but wondered if they considered it bad for business. Edwards adds, "Some don't want to talk about certain things or be reminded of the risks that might make a guy hesitant."

Magraken also helped create and sits on the Association of Boxing





Commissions (ABC) Fighter's Voice Committee, which advocates for warning labels on boxing equipment like headgear. Too many assume that headgear protects a fighter against brain injury, but none on the market currently do. Yes, well-fitted headgear will protect against cuts, but not concussion. I often see poorly fitting headgear that forces the fighter to keep his/her chin up, further increasing susceptibility to a knockout/concussion.

Dangerous weight cuts can contribute to more than a poor performance. "If a fighter cuts weight too early and then spars tough rounds in a depleted state close to fight, that's a risk," says Edwards. He agrees there is no excuse to ignore a guy getting hurt in the gym. "I send them to a hyperbaric chamber, at least 10 days off, and they must be cleared by a doctor to return."

In the U.S., fighters are given automatic suspensions by commissions, dependent upon the number of rounds they fought or the degree of punishment received. These restrictions include when they can resume contact training and a separate date for when they can schedule another bout. Unfortunately, there's no way to "police" the gyms or make certain the fighters and their trainers are following the no-contact restrictions.

So what do fighters and trainers need to know about sparring or resuming contact too soon – especially without medical clearance?

A well-known fighter with an upcoming bout overseas was kayoed in the gym while finishing training in Las Vegas. He was hospitalized for several days. Unbeknownst to the commission and ring physicians, due to some dishonesty on the part of the fighter and his team, he competed, was severely knocked out and never fought again.

Automatic suspensions are given for a reason. You can't train away a head injury, whether it occurred in the gym or a bout, and you can't underestimate the magic of rest. In fact, competing again too soon cannot just ruin a career; it can produce the lethal Second Impact Syndrome (SIS). SIS refers to a significant head injury followed by resuming contact again too soon, resulting in death.

Most importantly, those working with or even residing with fighters need to understand the importance of concussion symptoms, which include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, slowed reflexes, confusion or memory problems, nausea, depression, irritability, anxiety, blurred vision or sleep disturbance.

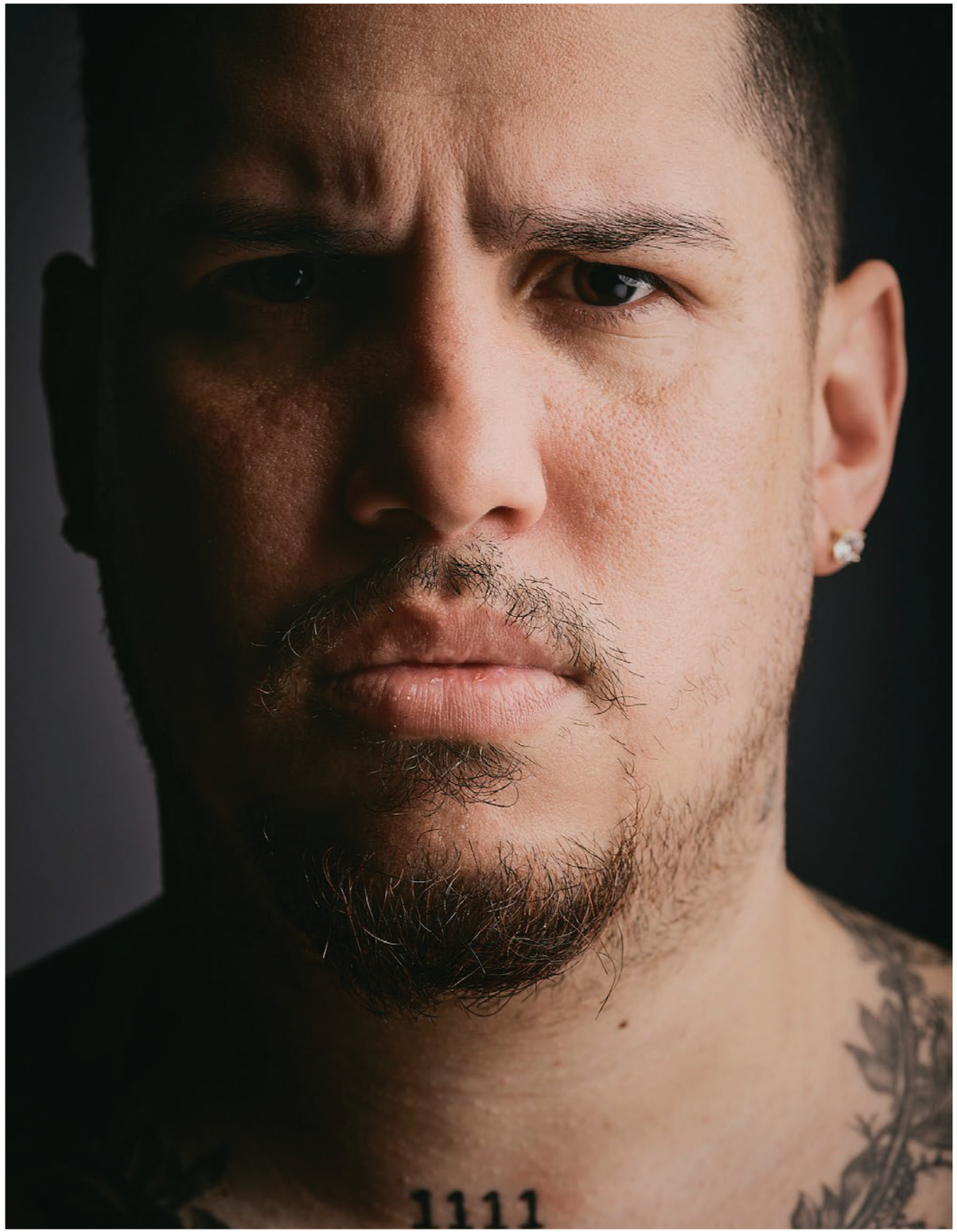
We get it! Fighters typically don't want to admit weakness in the gym or in a bout. But trainers and family members need to ask questions and not simply assume their boxer is OK when they may be suffering.

All involved need to know that the brain changes resulting in CTE start during the fighter's career but typically do not become evident until after retirement. There are ways to lessen the risks by limiting repetitive hits to the head, including those that don't result in concussive blows or what is termed "sub-concussive blows." Just like a car that breaks down after so many miles, the same pertains to the brain. Head shots are additive, and even if the eventual repercussions are ignored, head blows affect performance. No one is saying fighters shouldn't spar. But "competitive sparring" – limiting head shots, as described by Edwards – doesn't have to include trauma.

Edwards (left), pictured with Caleb Plant, is safety-first with his fighters.

"Some don't want to talk about certain things or be reminded of the risks that might make a guy hesitant."

Dr. Margaret Goodman is a former Nevada State Athletic Commission chief physician, co-hosts the Fighter Health and Safety Podcast and is president of the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association.



Jose Luis Guzman

From Opponent to Trainer: A Life in Boxing

Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

Jose Luis Guzman has devoted his life to boxing.

Guzman, now 37, was born in Puerto Rico and grew up in The Bronx, New York City. When he was a boy, boxing kept him off the streets and out of trouble. In his years as a club fighter, it gave him a sense of self-worth. Now he's earning a reputation as one of the better young trainers in New York.

"The ring has always been my happy place," he says.

Guzman was what is known in the trade as an opponent. He turned pro at age 18, fought at weights ranging from 127 to 138 pounds and was never matched against a fighter with a losing record. Sometimes he was given only a day's notice before a fight. Sometimes he won and the judges took the decision from him.

"I knew I was the opponent," Jose says. "But I never lay down for anyone and always tried my best to win. I loved the thrill of walking into the ring and going from being a regular person to being a gladiator. For me, it was the best feeling in the world."

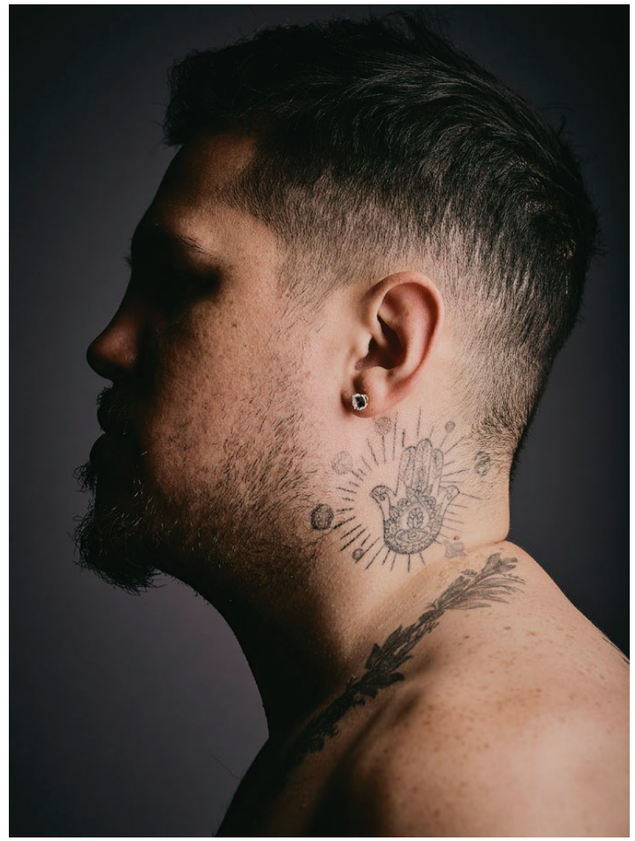
Guzman was matched against prospects like Teon Kennedy (who finished his career with a 19-2-2 record) and Carlos Zambrano (27-2). He fought two Olympians – silver medalist John Joe Nevin of Ireland (now 17-0) and Jonathan Alonso of Spain (currently 24-2). In 2009, he lost a six-round decision to Chris Algieri.

"It was an amazing feeling for me when Chris beat [Ruslan] Provodnikov to win a world title and fought Manny Pacquiao," Jose recalls. "Chris is a nice guy and I gave him a tough fight. I was super-excited and happy for him."

Guzman finished his ring career in 2016 with a 6-14-1 record, no knockouts, and six losses by KO. Those weren't the numbers he had hoped for. But he'd learned his craft. Then he turned to training.

Jose now works primarily out of Victory Boxing Gym in New York and is the lead trainer for world-ranked bantamweight Dominique Crowder. He assists Aureliano Sosa in training Jarrell Miller and recently spent two months in Puerto Rico helping Jordan Maldonado prepare Amanda Serrano for her trilogy fight against Katie Taylor.

"I work with some big fighters," Guzman says. "And there are kids who I train for free. My life has always been about boxing. Most of us don't become world champions. But boxing makes us better people." RING



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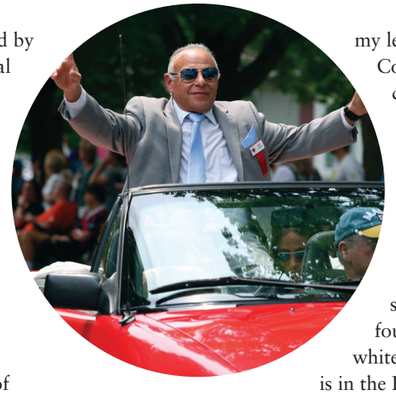
COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

A PLACE IN HISTORY

By Randy Gordon



After a summer that was highlighted by my induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Class of 2025, I've been thinking a lot about boxing's highest honor.

My induction made me the fifth former editor-in-chief of The Ring to make it to Canastota (Nat Fleischer, Bert Sugar, Nigel Collins and Steve Farhood are the others); the sixth Long Islander (preceded by Fleischer, Arthur Mercante Sr., Gil Clancy, Buddy McGirt and Al Gavin; Emile Griffith and Floyd Patterson were part-time residents of L.I.); the second "Randy" to be inducted (the other is former welterweight champ Randy Turpin, who was inducted posthumously in 2001).

I wonder who next summer's class will be. I do believe former unified middleweight titleholder Gennadiy Golovkin – whose last fight was in 2022 – will be on the ballot this year and should have no trouble being inducted. The same with former three-division titleholder Leo Santa Cruz.

I also have put together a list of those I'd like to see inducted, along with my reason why. It's my "Wish List." I'm sure each of you have your own.

THE 10 NAMES I WANT TO SEE IN THE IBHOF

(In alphabetical order)

1. **Iran Barkley:** He won world titles in *three* divisions. He is the *only* fighter to beat IBHOF-enshrined Thomas Hearns *twice*. He fought from middleweight up to heavyweight. Since his last fight – in 1999 – he has been a major part of the East Coast boxing scene. He obliges fans, autograph-seekers and selfie-takers with a smile.
2. **Nigel Benn:** I think it borders on insanity that this two-division titleholder is not wearing an IBHOF ring. In his 10-year career, he fought 48 times, winning 42 of the bouts and losing only five. His left hook was one of the best hooks ever seen in the sport. Many of his 35 knockouts are of highlight-reel variety. He made nine successful defenses of the WBC super middleweight title against top opposition.
3. **Kathy Collins:** Call her a trailblazer or whatever. In 1995, after female boxing was finally allowed in New York (under my leadership as chairman of the NYSAC), Collins won the first match. She went on to capture the WIBF welterweight title. Her only two losses were by a questionable split decision to Leah Mellinger and by majority decision to Christy Martin at Madison Square Garden. Since retiring from competition in 2001, Collins, along with her husband, Frankie, owns and operates one of Long Island's most successful boxing gyms, where she can be found every day, training everybody from white-collar boxers to amateurs and pros. She is in the International Women's Boxing Hall of Fame, the New York State Boxing Hall of Fame and the Atlantic City Boxing Hall of Fame.
4. **Gerry Cooney:** Gerry is the reason there should be another category. He is boxing's Goodwill Ambassador. I don't want to hear that he was not a champion. There are champions in Canastota who arguably don't belong there. Gerry's three losses came against three of the best fighters in history. He was the owner of one of heavyweight history's greatest left hooks. Contenders fade from memory. Not Cooney. How many non-champs are widely recognized everywhere they go – 35 years after their last fight? Not one! Since 2009, Cooney has been my co-host on SiriusXM's "At the Fights." Fans remember him. Fans love him. He is a frequent after-dinner speaker. Not a week goes by where he isn't doing something boxing-related. In Canastota every year, he is besieged by fans for photos and autographs. Does he belong in the IBHOF? He absolutely does. Put him in a category called "All-Around Contributor."
5. **Henry Hascup:** One of boxing's leading historians. Founder and longtime president of the NJBHOF. Has emceed more boxing dinners and functions than anybody. Has computerized every champion and contender over the last 120+ years, rating them according to how many champions and contenders they beat and how long each remained in The Ring Magazine's Top 10. He is one of a kind!
6. **Kevin Iole:** For 17 years, Iole was the boxing writer for the Las Vegas Review-Journal. Then he kept us informed as the boxing writer for Yahoo! Sports. He retired in 2025. I know how hard he worked over those years and this quiet, humble man whose love for boxing showed in his work.
7. **Junior Jones:** In a 14-year career, Jones won titles in both the bantamweight and junior featherweight divisions. He finished his career at featherweight, where he scored a decision over former two-division titleholder Tracy Harris Patterson and gave then-IBF beltholder Paul Ingle a hell of a challenge. He holds two wins over Marco Antonio Barrera and one over Orlando Canizales, both Hall of Famers. A very outgoing man, Junior attends dozens of boxing-related functions in and around New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut every year.
8. **Don Majeski:** This guy has been in the business for no less than five decades. He is an agent, matchmaker and a promoter's dream come true with the amount of shows he saves. One of boxing's two leading historians (the other being Hascup). His induction would be a no-brainer.
9. **Ray Mercer:** Mercer didn't just represent the U.S. in the Olympic Games, he won a medal at the 1988 Olympics in the 201-pound division – a GOLD medal – stopping all of his competition in brutal fashion. During his 20-year career in the paid ranks, he put together a 36-7-1 (26 KOs) record, winning the WBO heavyweight title along the way. Since retiring in 2008, he is still front and center at many boxing shows, dinners and banquets. He was a fan favorite in his fighting days and remains one today.
10. **James "Smitty" Smith:** Since he was a kid in Florida, boxing has been his passion. His "In This Corner" podcast has been on the air for nearly 25 years and is still going strong. He also does both blow-by-blow and color commentary. He is a sought-after speaker at dinners and functions; and is the yearly emcee at the IBHOF weekend in Canastota. I would love to see him be inducted, then emcee the weekend as an inductee.

Send me your list at RGBoxing@yahoo.com

★★★★

While I am at it, let me give you my list of the top 10 referees working today:

1. **Tom Taylor**
2. **Harvey Dock**
3. **Mark Nelson**
4. **Michael Griffin**
5. **Ricky Gonzalez**
6. **Steve Gray**
7. **Marcus McDonnell**
8. **Ed Collantes**
9. **Charlie Fitch**
10. **Jon Schorle**

QUICK HITS:

SiriusXM did a shuffle of its sports shows. As a result, "At the Fights," the boxing show I have done for nearly 17 years alongside Gerry Cooney, has a new time, a new channel and one new day. We are now on every Monday and Thursday from 9-11 p.m. (ET) on Faction Talk Radio, channel 103.

I loved watching the Netflix broadcast of the all-female fight card from MSG, headlined by Taylor-Serrano 3. I thought Netflix did a super job of assembling its announcing crew. I especially loved hearing the two Seans (Wheelock, the scoring commentator, and blow-by-blow announcer Grande) mixing with Seniesa Estrada. Hopefully, Netflix uses this same crew on its next major boxing event.

Keep an eye on 22-year-old Julius "Juju" Ballo. The featherweight, who racked up a slew of amateur accolades and recently signed with Top Rank, made his pro debut on the July 26 Xander Zayas-Jorge Garcia undercard with a four-round unanimous decision over Brandan Ayala. Zayas won the vacant WBO 154-pound belt with a unanimous decision over Garcia. The card also featured featherweight contender Bruce "Shu Shu" Carrington, who outpointed Mateus Heita.

ATTENTION BOXING FANS:

Our beloved sport is about to undergo a major facelift, a total overhaul, a complete revision.

Two politicians – Brian Jack (R-GA) and Sharice Davids (D-KS) – have introduced to Congress an innovative bipartisan bill that is designed to update federal boxing regulations in regard to many areas of the sport.

The bill, which is being called the "Muhammad Ali American Boxing Revival Act," seeks to give boxers an alternative to dealing with the "alphabet soup" organizations – the IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO and others – and their often questionable and even laughable ratings.

Let's take a quick look back 33 years.

In 1992, after James Toney, in defense of his IBF middleweight title, won a controversial 12-round split decision against Dave Tiberi, U.S. Senator Harry Reid put together a Senate subcommittee hearing to delve into the workings of professional boxing. As chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission, I was among those called to answer questions from the subcommittee.

We knew going into the hearings that boxing's business model was defective and flawed. We all knew it needed to be improved.

What came out of those hearings, though it took nearly eight years, was the "Muhammad Ali Professional Boxing Reform Act." Now, one-quarter of a century later, that legislation also needs to be overhauled.

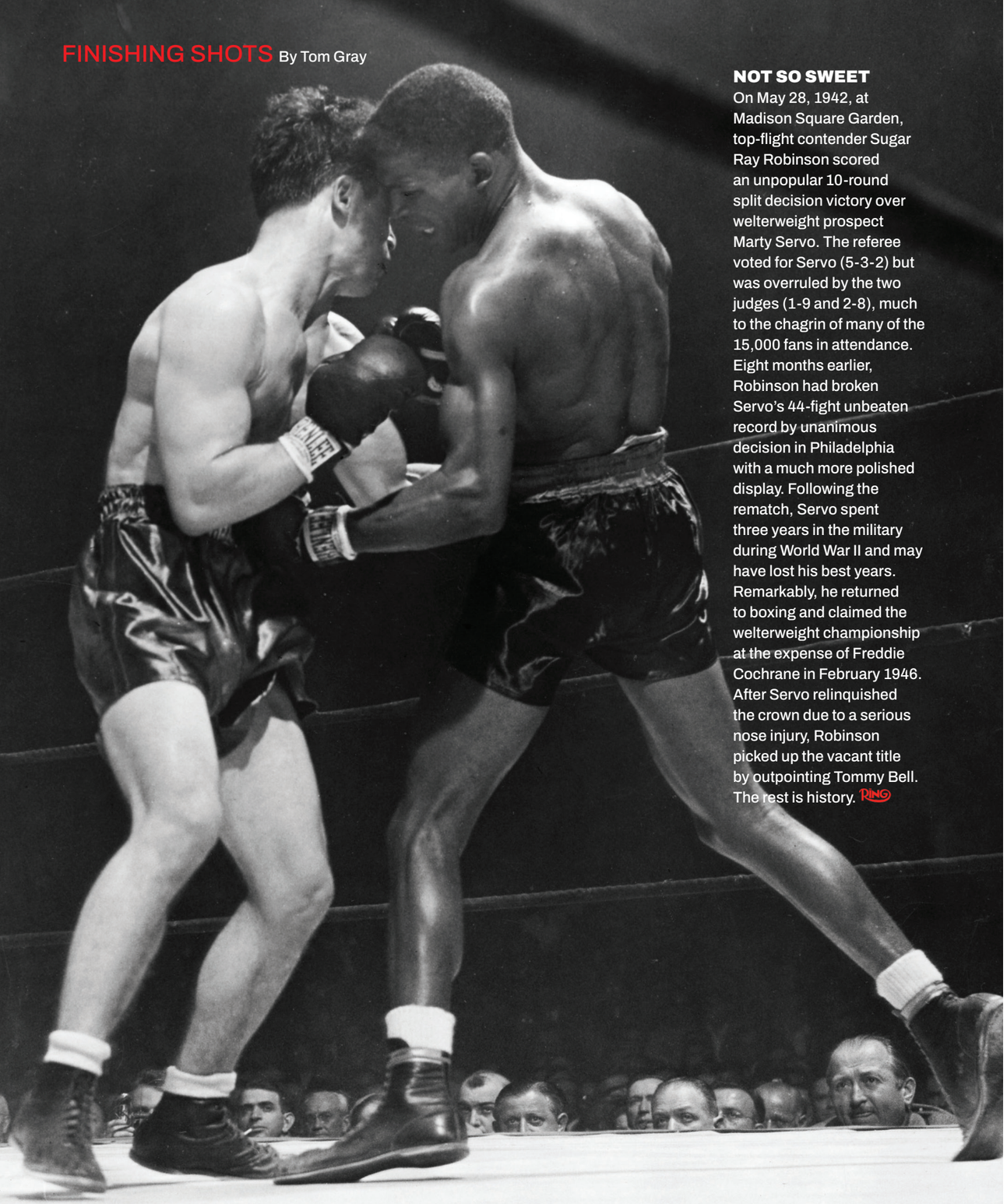
That's why we expect the new bill to pass.

It's time for a major change.

Stay tuned! RING

Randy Gordon finally got to be part of the parade he has seen so many times.

Ed Mulholland



NOT SO SWEET

On May 28, 1942, at Madison Square Garden, top-flight contender Sugar Ray Robinson scored an unpopular 10-round split decision victory over welterweight prospect Marty Servo. The referee voted for Servo (5-3-2) but was overruled by the two judges (1-9 and 2-8), much to the chagrin of many of the 15,000 fans in attendance. Eight months earlier, Robinson had broken Servo's 44-fight unbeaten record by unanimous decision in Philadelphia with a much more polished display. Following the rematch, Servo spent three years in the military during World War II and may have lost his best years. Remarkably, he returned to boxing and claimed the welterweight championship at the expense of Freddie Cochrane in February 1946. After Servo relinquished the crown due to a serious nose injury, Robinson picked up the vacant title by outpointing Tommy Bell. The rest is history. RING

FIGHTLINE

BY DOUG FISCHER

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking two of the best Americans ever to rule the 115-pound division – Johnny Tapia and Jesse Rodriguez.

Tapia, a talented but troubled boxer-slugger from Albuquerque, New Mexico, rose to the top of the 115-pound ranks before Rodriguez was born. "Mi Vida Loca" defended the WBO title 13 times between 1994-1998, defeating top contenders Arthur Johnson, Hugo Soto and crosstown rival Danny Romero, whom he outpointed in July 1997 to unify the WBO and IBF belts.

Tapia left the 115-pound division in 1998 in search of bigger foes and paydays, winning world titles at bantamweight (twice) and featherweight. As spirited as he was skilled, Tapia was unbeaten in 48 bouts (46-0-2) before he suffered his first loss, a close unanimous decision to Paulie Ayala in The Ring's 1999 Fight of the Year. Tapia, who passed away at 45 in 2012, finished his pro career with a 59-5-2 (30 KOs) record and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2017.

Rodriguez (22-0, 15 KOs), the reigning Ring Magazine junior bantamweight champion, is a 25-year-old boxer-puncher from San Antonio. In the span of three and a half years, "Bam" has climbed to the top of the 115-pound division while also rising in the pound-for-pound rankings. Back-to-back victories over former champs Carlos Cuadras (UD 12) and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (TKO 8) commanded instant respect in 2022.

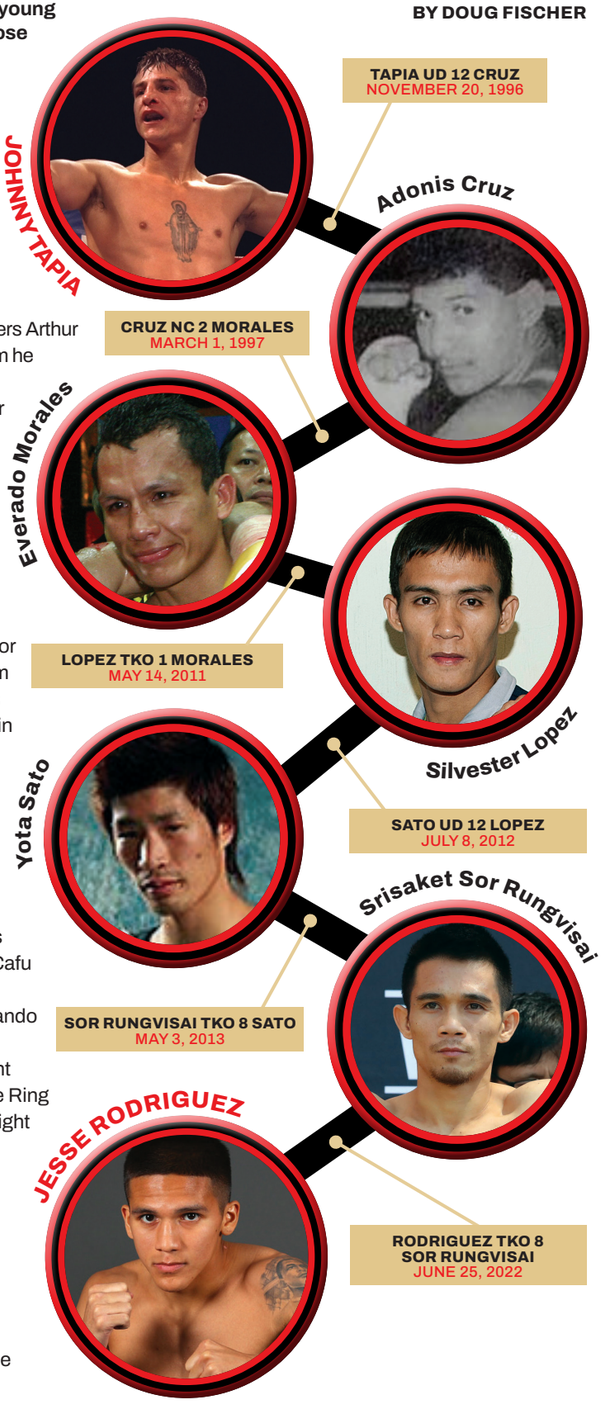
After a title-unifying pitstop at flyweight in 2023, Rodriguez returned to junior bantamweight with an elite-level statement against Juan Francisco Estrada in 2024, stopping the future Hall of Famer in seven rounds to win the Ring Magazine and WBC titles. He added the WBO belt to his collection with an impressive 10th-round TKO of Phumelela Cafu this past July.

Rodriguez is set to take on unbeaten WBA titleholder Fernando Martinez in November in what could be his toughest fight to date, but, like Tapia, the Texas technician possesses the talent and desire to pursue glory in higher weight classes. Japanese Ring champs Junto Nakatani and Naoya Inoue loom at bantamweight and junior featherweight.

There are multiple paths linking the junior bantamweight kings, whose primes are separated by almost 30 years, but we found this five-boxer Fightline.

Can you find a faster route?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage the fights must come in chronological order. RING



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